the weekly
Standard

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NOEMIE EMERY • WILLIAM KRISTOL

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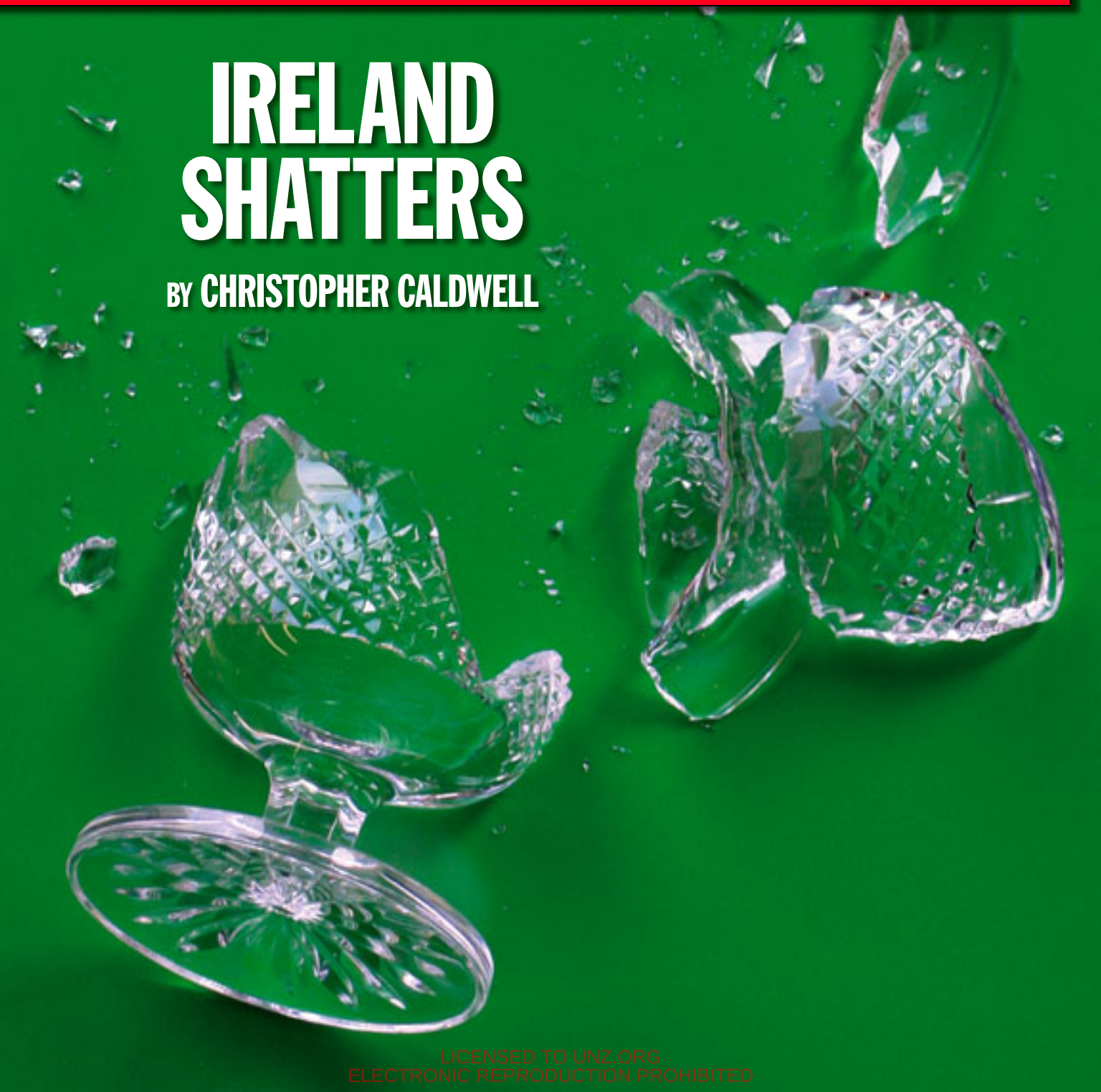
BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL



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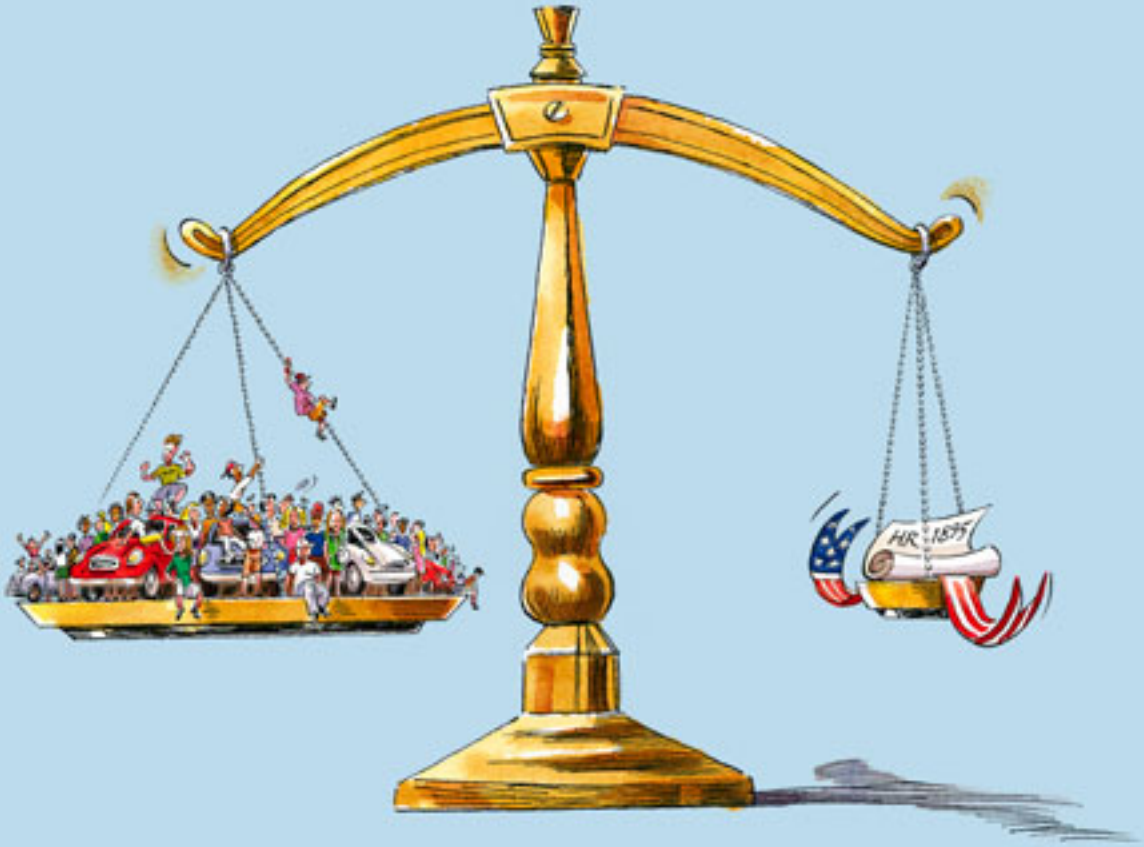

On April 3, ***Congressmen Tim Bishop (D-NY) and Mike Castle (R-DE)*** introduced a bill to help stop the #1 killer of teenagers: car crashes. Called the STANDUP Act* (H.R. 1895), this would establish one national law designed to reduce the number of teen driving deaths.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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We've Only Just Begun

The Scrapbook seldom finds itself in agreement with David Axelrod, the Democratic political guru who gave America Barack Obama. But we couldn't agree more with his dismissive attitude toward the media's breathless commemoration of President Obama's First Hundred Days in office.

Taking stock at the end of the First Hundred Days, says Axelrod, is a "Hallmark holiday," a Washington contrivance of no particular significance.

Right you are, Mr. Axelrod. The trouble is that President Obama seems not to agree with you. To mark his hundredth day, the commander in chief flew to St. Louis last week for a self-congratulatory, and thoroughly scripted, "town meeting" with selected Democratic voters, and then conducted a prime-time news conference (also, one might say, with selected Democratic voters), in which he made no news but projected his customary self-confidence.

Of course, The Scrapbook can hardly expect a politician to avoid an opportunity for self-glorification. The trouble is that the media are supposed to be the grownups in circumstances like this; but (as we have also come to expect) the media recorded Obama's First Hundred Days in roughly the same tones as an adolescent girl confiding in her diary about that hunky quarterback.

The *Washington Post* is a case in point. On Wednesday readers were presented with a heavily promoted eight-page special section—"100 Days: President Obama's First Months in Office"—with the requisite thoughtful portrait of Obama on the front page, 15 more pictures inside (Obama with chin in hand, hugging Michelle, speaking in cabinet, meeting with young people, addressing Congress, high-fiving the troops, furrowing his brow, romping with Bo, conferring with Joe Biden), and a special report on the first lady and the two Obama daughters.

To this informative package were added observations from impartial observers of Democratic presidents (Doris Kearns Goodwin: "He knows how to relax and enjoy himself," Sean Wilentz: "He's done well," Walter Isaacson: "Astonishingly successful," Douglas Brinkley: "He's a historic figure") and the hard-hitting coverage that is the *Post*'s trademark ("Communicator in Chief Has a Tone for Every Situation," "From the Start, Putting a Bold Stamp on the White House").

All right, so we've demonstrated that the *Post* (and the *New York Times* and network news and *The Today Show* and CNN) abased themselves before Barack Obama—again. But the larger point is that commemorating the First Hundred Days in office is not only a meaningless contrivance, but a stunningly misleading contrivance as well.

The whole notion began with the flurry of domestic legislative activity that accompanied Franklin Roosevelt, who entered office in 1933 facing closed banks, 25 percent unemployment, a giant worldwide industrial slump, high tariffs, a depressed stock market—and Adolf Hitler in power in Germany for just five weeks. By the time Roosevelt's presidency ended in 1945 it was the defeat of Hitler—not the banks or unemployment—which signified success or failure.

Subsequent Democratic presidents have made something of a cult of their First Hundred Days, usually to their sorrow: John F. Kennedy tried the hardest in 1961, and had only the Bay of Pigs catastrophe to show for it. But the fact is that the First Hundred Days are seldom a precursor of what is to come. Jimmy Carter entered the White House in 1977 full of resolve to defuse tensions with the Soviet Union, solve the "energy crisis," restore integrity to the presidency, and fix the economy. He ended with Bert Lance, gas lines, double-digit inflation, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and American diplomats held hostage in Tehran.

Unquestionably, President Obama has made it clear that the next four years will constitute a deliberate break from the policies of the last eight years, whether it's government-run health care or friendly overtures to Iran and Venezuela or higher taxes. He certainly has the support of the media and a Democratic Congress. But there are 1,461 days in any presidential term, and his has barely begun. ♦

The Financial Crisis in Academe (cont.)

The economic tough times have come calling on Smith College. Faced with a need to reduce the budget by $30 million and the faculty by 30 over the next two years, the college released a plan to start the saving by firing the school's three chaplains. This wouldn't be particularly noteworthy except that the move is being sold to students not as a sacrifice, but as an opportunity to . . . wait for it . . . increase diversity on campus.

Smith currently has chaplains who serve Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. But, as the *Sophian* reports, the administration argues that eliminating these positions will "promote religious and cultural diversity in the college." Staying on message, Dean Maureen Mahoney wrote, "Our student body has become increasingly diverse in every way, including religiously, and we believe students would be better served

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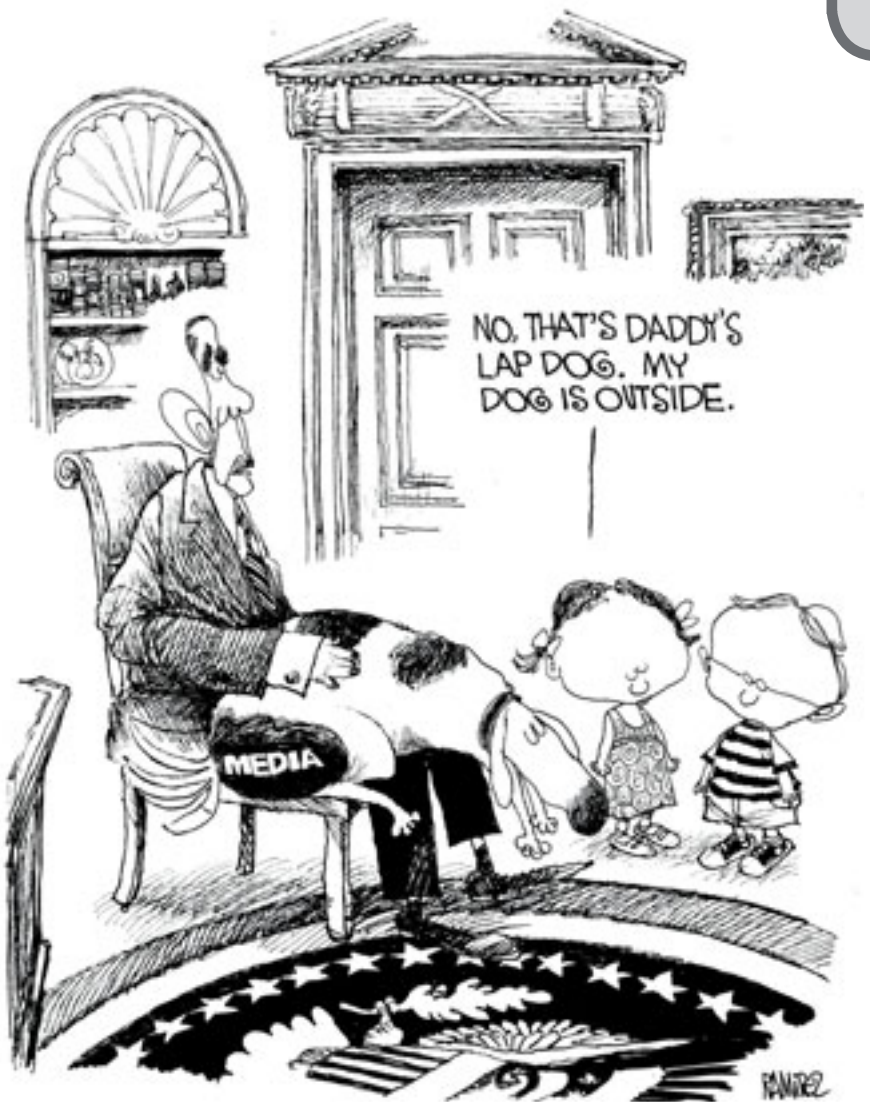

by moving away from the emphasis on these three faith groups and moving toward broader support for the full range of religious belief and practice on campus." Of course, this being Smith the chaplains were already working in a fairly ecumenical fashion, supporting groups from the Radical Catholic Feminists of Smith to the Hillel Foundation to the Association of Smith Pagans and Al-Iman.

Smith has spent much of the past few decades trying to erase its embarrassing religious roots. You'd hardly believe it, but the image at right—that's the Virgin Mary above the biblical inscription "In your virtue, knowledge"—was once an official school seal. You can't find it anywhere on campus these days. And the school's website reprints a passage from Sophia Smith's will establishing the college:

The Smith College seal

> It is my opinion that by the education of women, what are called their "wrongs" will be redressed, their wages adjusted, their weight of influence in reforming the evils of society will be greatly increased . . .

But the school actually airbrushes out—without even an ellipsis—what Smith's will really said:

> It is my opinion that *by the higher and more thoroughly Christian* education of women, what are called their "wrongs" will be redressed, their wages will be adjusted, their weight of influence in reforming the evils of society will be greatly increased . . . [emphasis added]

In this light, the firing of the Smith chaplains seems more of a piece with Rahm Emanuel's exhortation—never let a crisis go to waste.

On a related note, earlier this month Smith hired Andrea Stone as the English Department's new Professor of African Diasporic Literature. Some parts of the university are simply too valuable to lose. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish, 100-Days Version

'How should one assess the First Hundred Days of President Obama? I come at this question through an experience of some years ago. After he won the presidential election of 1980, Ronald Reagan asked his transition team to come up with an action plan for his early weeks in office. I was a co-captain of that team . . . " (David Gergen, CNN.com, April 29).

'If the first 100 days of President Obama's term have proved anything, it is that he is a hard man to classify . . . " (Gerald F. Seib, *Wall Street Journal*, April 29). ♦

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Casual

If You Can't Take the Heat . . .

When my brother-in-law Bill Dwyer asked if I'd be interested in judging a cook-off, I leapt at the opportunity. I'd always wanted to be a food judge—though I'd never imagined that the competition would be among Bill's fellow firefighters, or that it would take place in a firehouse kitchen.

But the captain, Kevin Pachas, didn't want to give a journalist the impression that all his team did was sit around and eat—hence he invited me to "PT" (physical training) with them prior to our dinner. This involved climbing up and down 15 flights of hotel stairs followed by 15 push-ups and sit-ups. I eked out three sets while the rest of Arlington County Fire Station 1 (C-shift) did about 10. Later, with my legs feeling like jelly, I told the captain that next time I'll just take him at his word.

In addition to extinguishing fires, breaking up drunken brawls, and reviving overdosed junkies, firemen need to eat. "Cooks in the fire department are gold," said Pachas. "They're right up there with good laddermen—a sought-after, high commodity." Station 1 is fortunate enough to have more than its share of this commodity, so much so it decided to hold its first-ever cook-off.

The competition was fierce. My brother-in-law made a London broil and scallops wrapped in bacon. Another fireman, James Johnson, brought a hearty macaroni and cheese but was disqualified since it was made, in fact, by Mrs. Johnson. Glenn Smith, a large Michigander nicknamed "Panda Head," is considered the station's top chef and did not disappoint, serving up a baked salmon topped with lump crabmeat. But in the end, the winner was Jeff Crooke (aka "Derek Smalls" because of his Spinal Tap mustache). Jeff reproduced his mother's sauerbraten and red cabbage with bacon. He also improvised: Where the recipe called for top round and juniper berries, he substituted chuck roast and gin (along with cider vinegar and Guinness). It worked brilliantly.

MATT COLLINS

Although the station gets on average 8 to 10 calls a day, the dinner itself was blissfully uninterrupted. And it allowed me to ask all sorts of questions: Is there a favorite firefighting movie? Have they ever rescued a cat from a tree? What is the best part of their day? How often do they find themselves in grave danger?

Concerning that last, "there are lots of times," says Captain Pachas. "Who hasn't fallen through a hole in a fire?" (Amazingly, I have not.) In 1995 Pachas was dealing with a garden apartment blaze when "our valve failed on the engine and we didn't get any water. The place flashed and I was the furthest one in." He shows me the burn scars on his left shoulder.

Pachas and Johnson also remember a time in Arlington about 20 years ago when black and Hispanic gangs from nearby neighborhoods were at each other's throats. Paramedics wore bulletproof vests when responding to calls. On one occasion, an ambulance driver nearly lost control when two rival gangmembers being treated inside his vehicle started fighting. Lately the station has seen an uptick in crime in the Asian community: One incident involved a fight between Koreans and Vietnamese in the back of a restaurant kitchen—never a good idea when one of the parties has access to carving knives and meat cleavers.

None of the men could recall ever rescuing a cat from a tree. But Pachas knew a lieutenant whose stock response to such a call was, "Lady, you ever see a cat skeleton in a tree?" Regarding a favorite firefighting movie, there is no consensus. *Backdraft* is easily the most quoted (though highly unrealistic). The battalion chief, who briefly stuck his head into the kitchen, said he prefers *The Towering Inferno*.

By and large the pace at Station 1 is not frenetic. "The thing is, most firehouse life is like this," says the captain, gesturing to his men around the table. "It's wonderful. We're laughing. We have a great time." He's being modest, though the level of activity here certainly pales in comparison with, say, a firehouse in the South Bronx in the early '70s: In the classic *Report From Engine Co. 82*, Dennis Smith wrote that his station responded to over 9,000 calls a year. Arson was rampant. Miscreants threw bricks at the firemen hanging from the pumper. (Arlington is a long way from the South Bronx, though the firemen here remind me that just across the river in the District, the calls can still get pretty intense.)

As for the best part of the day, says Jeff Crooke, it's "the rare occasion we're able to sleep all night." On that, everyone agreed.

Victorino Matus

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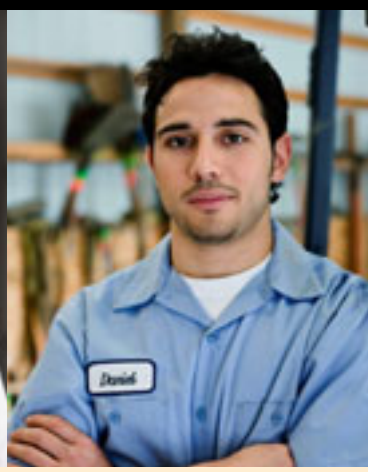

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the weekly Standard

Neither a Souter nor a Specter Be

To both departing Justice David Souter and party-switching Senator Arlen Specter, one is tempted to say: Don't let the door hit you on the way out.

Souter may have been the worst Supreme Court justice ever appointed by a Republican president. Ike regretted, as well he should have, putting Earl Warren and William Brennan on the high bench. But both were impressive individuals, if not constitutionally sound jurists. Souter has been unimpressively unsound.

As for Specter, his departure perfectly became him: It was entirely opportunistic, driven by his conviction that he'd lose the Republican primary, and that if he did, he couldn't do what Joe Lieberman did and run and win as an independent. The Democrats are welcome to him.

Having said all that, one has to acknowledge that the Souter and Specter developments are short-term victories for the left: Sixty votes in the Senate (assuming Al Franken is seated from Minnesota) will make liberal legislation harder to block or modify, and a younger (and probably cleverer) replacement for Souter isn't good for the cause of a constitutionalist Supreme Court.

On the other hand, if the fundamental Republican task is to pick up seats in 2010 and replace Obama in 2012—as it must be, for the sake of the country—and if the fundamental conservative task is to present alternatives to Obama's governance, then this week's news is not all bad.

With 60 Democrats in the Senate, it's Obama's Congress now. Republican obstructionism goes away as an issue and as a political talking point. Obama and the Democrats will be unambiguously in charge. Within a year, it will be Obama's and the Democrats' bailouts, Obama's and the Democrats' deficits, Obama's and the Democrats' tax hikes, and Obama's and the Democrats' domestic overreach.

Whomever Obama nominates to replace Souter (Second Circuit judge Sonia Sotomayor is the betting favorite) will almost certainly be confirmed. Many conservatives will want Republicans to stand on principle and to make the constitutionalist case against Obama's judicial-activist nominee. They'll be disappointed by most GOP senators, who'll decide to defer to the president/keep their powder dry/not alienate Hispanics, and will vote to confirm. So it could be a demoralizing few months for conservatives, as the Roberts and Alito confirmations were for the left.

On the other hand, the ascension of Sotomayor (or whomever), and the prospect of more Obama picks joining the Supreme Court and filling the lower courts over the next three years, will focus conservatives and Republicans on a range of constitutional and legal issues where they should have the political advantage. The conservative critique of ACLU-like court decisions and left-wing Justice Department briefs and actions, in areas ranging from national security to social issues, will remind lots of Americans about aspects of modern liberalism they, quite correctly, dislike. In particular, the performance of Eric Holder's Justice Department over the last few weeks suggests that a focus on legal/constitutional issues, perhaps especially with respect to national security, can't help but make the case for a Republican president and attorney general in 2012.

The Obama White House thinks it had a good week: Specter, Souter, and media fawning over the enchantment of Obama's first 100 days. But to us, this looks like irrational exuberance. This could prove the most bloated moment of the Obama bubble. The Obama administration took a wrong turn in the war on terror and is continuing down the road of disarmament in that war (the anti-torture memos and their fallout). It overreached with respect to the private sector (mishandling the attempted Chrysler bailout). And it continues to make a spectacle of its self-indulgence and narcissism (the Air Force One flyover of Manhattan and Joe Biden's swine flu comments).

Republicans and conservatives have a lot of work to do over the coming months and years. In one way, an additional Democratic senator and a younger liberal Supreme Court justice make the hurdles a little higher. But Arlen Specter and David Souter weren't going to help the cause of a revitalized conservatism—and their departures provide a chance to begin to clarify the alternative to Obamaism that conservatives must offer in time for 2010, and especially 2012.

—*William Kristol*

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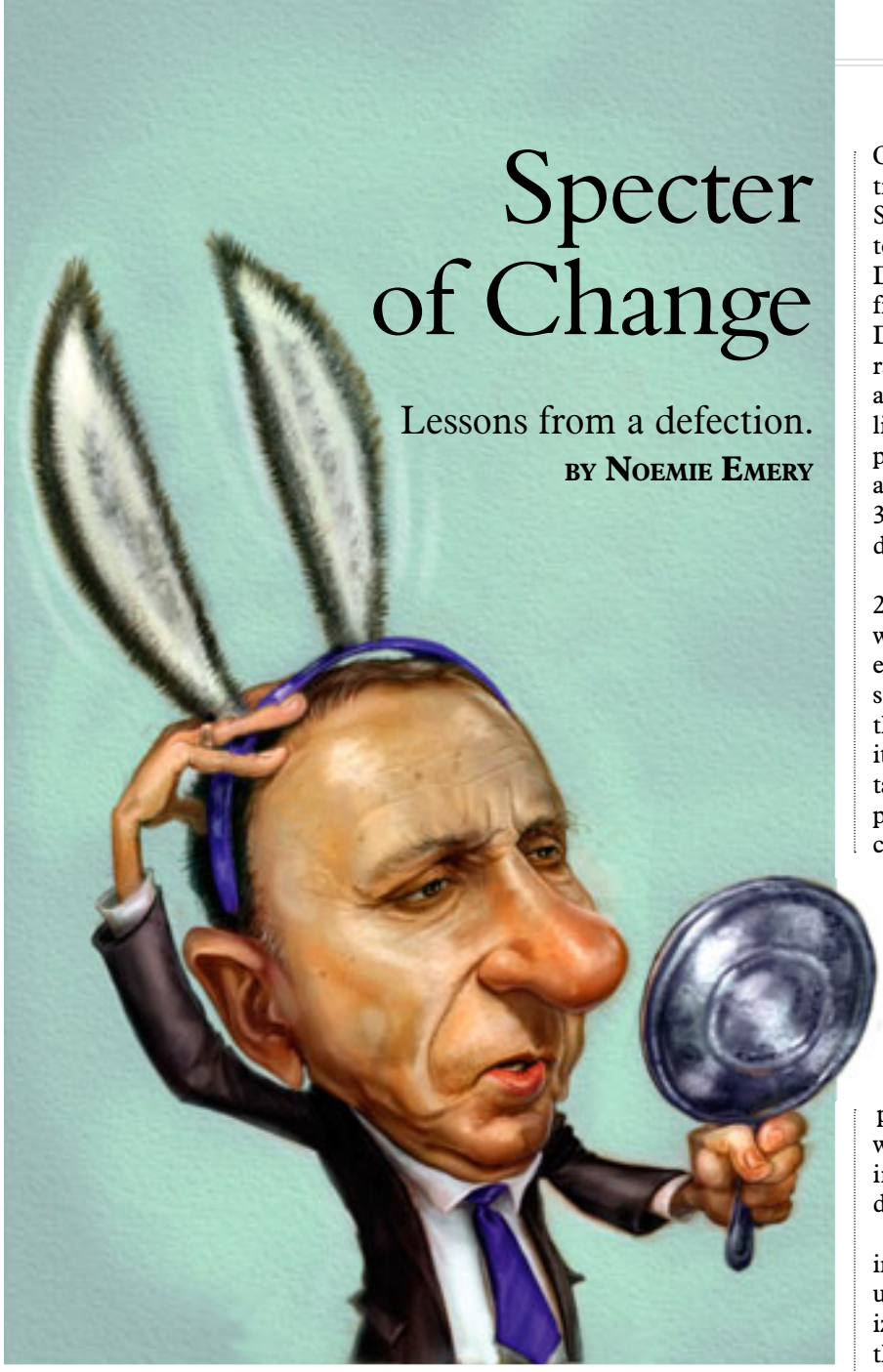
Specter of Change

Lessons from a defection.

BY NOEMIE EMERY



GARY LOCKE

No one knows why the chicken crossed the road, but why Arlen Specter crossed the aisle to the Democrats is a matter of rather less mystery, if intense debate. The why is quite simple: Free-range Republican, he was about to lose next year's Pennsylvania primary by a large margin, a problem he solved by changing his voter pool. But it was the how that is rather more pertinent: He was under attack from conservatives in his own party, opening questions less of whether the good and the best can be enemies than of whether removing the mediocre turns out to be worth it when the result is the worst of all worlds.

Specter was targeted in the primary by a conservative with the backing of the free-market, low-tax Club for Growth, pegged by *National Review*'s Ramesh Ponnuru as "The Club for Shrinkage," for its record of going after imperfect incumbents with down-the-line pure conservative activists, who go on to lose in the fall to a Democrat. In the *Washington Examiner*, Timothy Carney suggested that Specter's defection was prompted by the intention of Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina to back Specter's challenger, which DeMint had confided to Specter about five days before Specter switched. DeMint expressed no regrets: "I would rather have 30 Republicans in the Senate who really believe in principles of limited government, free markets, free people, than to have 60 that don't have a set of beliefs," he said. The fact that 30 senators cannot make policy didn't deter him at all.

DeMint is far from alone. After the 2008 election was over, an election which saw Republican numbers grow ever more minuscule, activists on all sides began vigorous efforts to make the party still smaller by purging from it everyone who failed to act, think, and talk as they did themselves. On op-ed pages, in magazines, on websites and cable and radio, a wide range of Republicans and right-wingers announced themselves shocked, appalled, mortified, and repelled to the point of nausea to find themselves in the same party with the likes of David Brooks, David Frum, Sarah Palin, Rush Limbaugh, Meghan McCain, Karl Rove, and a collection of other politicos, pundits, and personalities whose presence they seemed to find intolerable. A passion for coalition-destruction seemed to rage on all sides.

What lies behind this is (a) the feeling that oneself and one's friends make up a majority; and (b) a failure to realize that a party and movement are not the same thing. A movement exists to express and promote a coherent set of principles in the world of ideas and of values. A party—especially in a two-party system—is something quite different: a gathering of diverse political forces around a large and loosely held set of interests and values, that exists to give all of its factions access to power in the practical world of events. A movement gives a party a spine and a platform; the party assembles a coalition around them that is large enough to win and hold power, and turn some of the movement's ideas into law.

The conservative movement is a collection of theorists that self-selects

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for conformity. The Republican party is the vehicle for the center-right of the American polity, a group that includes the conservative movement, but is not quite of it, and includes many people who touch the conservative movement with different degrees of intensity, or only lightly, or on only a limited number of points.

Permutations are endless: Rudy Giuliani, right on defense, crime, and tax-cutting, but wrong (in the movement's view) on gays and abortion; George W. Bush, a hawk, tax-cutter, and social conservative, but a bleeding heart and big spender; John McCain, a strong defense and fiscal conservative, but a maverick on many things else. All are considered as grave disappointments by the purists of the conservative movement, who also give failing grades to every Republican president since Coolidge, with the exception of Reagan, and sometimes even to him. The movement seems in a permanent funk over the party's unworthy leaders and often looks down on the party itself as being a drag on the movement's aspirations and prospects. The only problem is that the movement, if it is to be anything more than a really interesting reading group, needs the party if it wants to succeed.

The numbers say everything: Over recent decades, about a third of the population has self-described as conservative; just under half as moderate; while liberals come in at a little over one-fifth. This shows the strength of the conservative movement, in that it outpolls the liberals and, when combined with the large number of right-leaning moderates, can frequently reach a majority. But it also reveals its critical weakness: It is unable to push its own numbers beyond this one-third. This failure is the source of constant frustration to the movement, because it has to bargain with people it thinks "unreliable," who may stand with it on one set of issues and wander away on the next.

This is true of McCain, of Lindsey Graham, even more of the ladies from Maine, and of no one more than their former colleague Arlen Specter, who is with them on card check but against them on the stimulus package; against them on the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court in 1987, but with them as a stalwart on the equally contentious matter of Clarence Thomas. The problem for conservatives is that in the states that these senators come from, on-and-off backing is all they are likely to get. They can rail at the "unreliables" as RINOs (Republicans in Name Only), but this is a misnomer, as the Republicans are not in fact the conservative party. They are the party of the center-right, including those who are about one-eighth of an inch to the right of the center. Olympia Snowe doesn't owe her seat to conservative activists, but to the people of Maine, who elected her and presumably like what she's doing. If conservatives can't make their case to the people of Maine, it's a problem for them, not for Snowe and her voters. The alternative to her is not some idealized conservative activist. It's someone who never votes with them at all.

American political parties have never been uniform, much less monolithic, and shifting alliances on different issues are hardly unknown. The Democratic party of the FDR era included the worst segregationists and the civil rights movement, crypto-communists and southern reactionaries, and it saw the country through the Great Depression and the worst war in history, while electing Roosevelt four different times. Parties succeed when they group a large diverse crowd around a few major values. They fail when they spend more time pounding heretics than selling their principles.

What can conservatives do, if they want to extend their dominion? They might stop holding up Ronald Reagan as a shield and an icon and look instead at what Reagan did. He was a movement conservative and a movement leader, but he was also a politician, and a builder of party, who understood how a movement fit into a party, and how a party could move a movement ahead. Coalition destruction was not on his agenda. "He set out to run as the candidate of party unity, reaching out to Republican moderates, especially in the Northeast," as his biographer Steven F. Hayward has written. In 1978, when his aide Jeffrey Bell ran a Club for Growth-style primary challenge to liberal Republican Clifford Case of New Jersey, Reagan refused to intervene in Bell's favor, and when Bell won, he did not rub it in, but hailed it mainly as a win for the Kemp-Roth tax cut, which had been Bell's main issue. (Bell lost to Democrat Bill Bradley that fall.)

Reagan made it clear that his party had to grow beyond its old country club image, but when it came time to choose a vice president, he reached out to two country club moderates, Pennsylvania's Richard Schweiker in 1976 and George H.W. Bush four years later. Yet in his remarkable speech of February 1977, on the "New Republican Party," he said the party would also have to reach out to blue collar social conservatives, and recruit them "as leaders and as candidates."

Reagan would have seen Sarah Palin as an asset and not an embarrassment. He did not consider the party an embarrassment either, but the only mechanism through which the ideals of movement could ever be implemented. "The biggest single grouping of conservatives is to be found in that party. It makes more sense to build on that grouping than to break it up and start over," he said to those who suggested that option. "Conservatism is not a narrow ideology, nor is it the exclusive property of conservative activists," he said to an audience of exactly those activists.

> Let me say this about our friends who are now Republicans but do not identify themselves as conservatives. I want the record to show that I do not view the new revitalized Republican party as one based on a principle of exclusion. After all, you do not get to be a majority party by searching for groups you won't associate or work with. If we truly believe in our principles, we should sit down and talk.

Someone ought to read this to all of those "true heirs" of Reagan, before they end up with those 30 seats in the Senate that Jim DeMint speaks of. Or before as many as 30 seats in the Senate start to look like a pretty good deal. ♦

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Sixty Miles from the Capital

The Obama administration mishandles Pakistan's Taliban crisis. BY MICHAEL RUBIN

On April 22, several hundred Taliban fighters moved from their stronghold in the Swat Valley to the neighboring district of Buner, just 60 miles from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton underscored the seriousness of the crisis, accusing the Pakistani government of "abdicating to the Taliban" and suggesting that instability in Pakistan posed a "mortal threat" to international security. While the Taliban retreated to Swat, the challenge they pose remains. Indeed, on April 30, General David Petraeus said that the Taliban's challenge makes the next two weeks critical to Pakistan's survival.

These events illustrate the weakness of the Obama foreign policy. Addressing the House Foreign Affairs Committee the day of the Taliban's advance, Clinton declared, "The government of Pakistan … must begin to deliver government services, otherwise they are going to lose out to those who show up and claim that they can solve people's problems." The issue in the Swat Valley, however, is not simply lack of government services.

Throughout his campaign, Barack Obama articulated twin national security themes. First, he dismissed the decision to liberate Iraq as "misguided" and promised instead to "refocus our resources on al Qaeda in Afghanistan and finish the fight with the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11." Second, he promised "smart diplomacy" toward friend and foe alike. His advisers spoke of smart power that would enhance aid and development. "With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of foreign policy," Clinton declared at her confirmation hearing.

Putting aside the fact that Joseph Nye, who coined the term smart power, meant it to complement rather than replace the use of hard power, what the Obama administration misses is the nature of the danger posed by extremist ideology—especially when combined with diplomacy allowing Islamists to establish safe havens. Here, the Taliban advance on Buner is instructive.

> The call for land reform doesn't show much understanding of the region. The Swat Valley, a resort area, was relatively well off until the Taliban took root. Indeed, a constant feature of Islamist insurgency is sabotage of economic development.

On February 15, after fighting for almost two years at a cost of 1,500 lives, the Pakistanis and the Taliban struck a deal. The government of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province signed the Malakand Accord with Sufi Mohammed, head of the radical Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law). This agreement imposed Islamic law on the Swat Valley, effectively handing control to the Taliban. This was not the first deal struck between the Pakistani government and Islamist radicals—Islamabad had reached similar accords in South Waziristan, North Waziristan, and Bajaur. But it was the first to test the Obama administration's new approach.

Rather than view the Malakand Accord as a compromise to end bloodshed, the Taliban interpreted it as a display of weakness to be exploited. No one should be surprised. In 2004, Abu Bakr Naji, a prominent jihadist ideologue, published a treatise entitled *The Management of Savagery* (*Idarat at-Tawahhush*) in which he rebuffed earlier al Qaeda theoreticians to argue that the key to advanced jihad is first to hold territory and then to impose a government that enforces Islamic law.

With their safe haven established, the Taliban doubled the number of fighters in the Swat Valley to at least 6,000, enabling a column to move on Buner less than 10 days after Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari signed legislation implementing the Malakand Accord. As the column advanced, a Taliban spokesman announced that Osama bin Laden would be welcome in Swat.

Secretary Clinton is not alone in her refusal to grasp that the Taliban's challenge is essentially ideological and not grievance-based. An April 17 article in the *New York Times* placed blame for the Taliban's rise on the lack of land reform in the Swat Valley, where approximately 50 landowners dominated economic life. True, Sufi Mohammed and his son-in-law, Maulana Fazlullah, a former ski lift worker in Swat who now heads the militia of the Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, exploited the economic angle to win recruits, but this was only part of their strategy.

They also used torture and execution to intimidate. Fazlullah is famous for broadcasting over the radio the names of those deemed inimical to Taliban interests or disobedient to its rule. As the Taliban murdered their targets in the Swat Valley, they displayed the mutilated bodies in local markets, promising similar treatment to anyone who removed the macabre dis-

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play. Clinton appears unaware that that those living under such a brutal regime are kept in check by fear.

Nor does the call for land reform show much understanding of the region. The Swat Valley, a resort area, was relatively well off until the Taliban took root. Sacrificing property rights to accommodate a utopian vision of social justice might resolve one Taliban talking point, but the group would simply find another grievance. Land reform would not end the Taliban's march—but it would further destabilize a teetering Pakistan.

Indeed, a constant feature of Islamist insurgency—whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, or now Pakistan—is sabotage of economic development for the purpose of undercutting government control. This is why Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq's Anbar Province and Moktada al-Sadr in Baghdad and southern Iraq both directed their forces to destroy schools, sabotage electrical lines, and target development workers. If the economy is good, jihadists seek to wreck it. While the West sees brain drain as a tragedy, radical Islamists see it as a godsend, simultaneously getting rid of the pesky middle class and gutting the economy so they can fill the void. The antidote should be to strengthen government control—not to cede it, as Pakistan did.

So what should the Obama administration learn from the Taliban's tactical victory? First, soft power and economic development are irrelevant to this situation unless they are enabled by hard power.

Second, engagement is no panacea. Not all our adversaries share Obama's good faith. The Taliban—or, for that matter, the Iranian leadership—are motivated not by earthly desires, but by a religious ideology, one that brands any government unwilling to bow to their demands as illegitimate and Satanic. To them, negotiations can be useful only for gaining immediate advantage: The Taliban might gain safe haven; Tehran might gain time.

While it would be unfair to suggest that Obama himself has sought to engage the Taliban, senior officials surrounding the president do urge talks. (The Clinton administration, it should be remembered, actually sent an emissary to meet with the Taliban in 1997, and even after 9/11 Secretary of State Colin Powell counseled reaching out to the "moderate Taliban.") Further, it is clear that the president does not appreciate the dangers of granting Islamists a safe haven. Weak condemnations of Zardari for doing this are meaningless, especially when the administration simultaneously pursues policies that will provide terrorists and their supporters safe haven in Iraq and Gaza.

Indeed, unless the president and the secretary of state understand that soft power and accommodation are about as effective at countering Islamism as lollipops are at curing cancer, the march to Buner may become the symbol of the Obama presidency, played out repeatedly, from Baghdad to Basra to Beirut. ♦

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The Pharaoh Strikes Back

Egypt vs. Hezbollah. BY DAVID SCHENKER

Plainclothes Egyptian police tackle pro-Hezbollah protesters in Cairo, 2006

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Anyone who has watched an Arab summit knows that the Middle East is racked with divisions. The highlight reel from the March 2009 Doha summit leads with a lengthy ad hominem attack by Libya's leader Muammar Qaddafi against Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, so severe that the Qatari hosts cut the audio feed midstream.

But the fissures run much deeper than personal animosity. The Arab world is embroiled in a cold war, pitting Iranian allies Syria, Qatar, Hezbollah, and Hamas against "moderate" pro-West states like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. The battle—between competing regional visions of *moqawama* (resistance) and development and coexistence—has been joined in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq.

Washington has a clear interest in seeing its allies prevail in this contest and reversing the regional trend toward *moqawama* being driven by Iran. Slowing Tehran's momentum has proven difficult, however, at least in part because Washington's leading Arab ally, Egypt, has seen its regional influence decline. Tehran has capitalized on Cairo's diminished leadership role, asserting itself in Arab politics. The virtual absence of Egypt as a bulwark against Tehran's militancy has complicated Washington's efforts to promote moderation and check Iran's march toward a nuclear weapon.

But recent developments suggest that Egypt may finally be taking steps to reestablish itself as a counterweight to a resurgent Tehran. On April 8, Egyptian authorities announced the arrest last November of dozens of Hezbollah operatives in the Sinai. The announcement was accompanied by unprecedented Egyptian condemnations of the Iranian-Syrian backed organization and its popular leader, Hassan Nasrallah.

The arrest and subsequent war of words suggest an effort may be underway by moderate Arab states to roll back the increasingly pernicious Persian influence in the Levant.

According to Egyptian sources, the 49-strong Hezbollah cell rounded up in November—which included 13 Lebanese nationals and 2 Syrians—was plotting to attack Israeli tourists at Sinai beach resorts. The agents had been observed, Egyptian officials said, conducting pre-operational planning. Prosecutors also accused these operatives of setting up a surveillance network to monitor shipping traffic in the Suez Canal.

If attacks against Israelis or the canal had come to fruition, there is little doubt they would have done serious damage to Egypt, already suffering the consequences of the global economic downturn. Canal traffic—Egypt's third largest source of revenue—is already down 25 percent this year. And tourism, Egypt's leading industry, is highly dependent on security. Following the 1997 massacre of 58 foreign tourists in Luxor perpetrated by the Islamic Jihad, Egypt tourism fell off an estimated 50 percent, a calamity for the $3.7 billion industry.

Even before the arrests were announced, Cairo had a bone to pick with Hezbollah. During Israeli operations in Gaza this past January, despite pressures, Egypt maintained the Western-advocated policy of isolating Hamas, refusing to open the Rafah border and provide relief for the besieged Palestinian Islamists. Egypt's position was sharply denounced by Nasrallah. In a speech on December 28, 2008, he appealed to Egyptians to challenge their government, and "open the Rafah border crossing with your own bodies." Egyptian foreign minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit described the statement as a "declaration of war."

When the arrests were made public in early April, Nasrallah gave a televised speech on Hezbollah's *Al Manar* channel, taking the unusual step of claiming responsibility for the operatives. Instead of apologizing for the embarrassing incident, however, Nasrallah was unrepentant, even combative. Contrary to

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Egyptian claims, he said the cell was instead smuggling arms and explosives to Hamas in Gaza and had no intention of carrying out attacks on Egyptian soil. "If aiding the Palestinians is a crime," he added, "I am proud of it."

The response to Nasrallah's speech in the Egyptian government-controlled media was swift and harsh. On April 12, the leading government daily, *Al Gomhuria*, attacked Hezbollah as an agent of Iran that undermined Lebanese sovereignty, was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Lebanese in 2006 after it provoked a war with Israel, and killed dozens of innocents during its May 2008 invasion of Beirut.

Al Gomhuria was particularly pointed in its criticism of Nasrallah, calling the Hezbollah leader a "Monkey Sheikh," and "the son of garbage," who is "not the leader of the resistance" but the head of a "terrorist organization" that is "an ideological ally of al Qaeda." The editor of the government-affiliated *Rose al Yousef* magazine added that Lebanon should "surrender [Nasrallah] as a war criminal."

The arrests and the harsh public critiques were an Egyptian warning shot across the bow of Hezbollah's patron Iran. Egyptian-Iranian relations have been tense since the 1978 Camp David Accords. In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, to Tehran's consternation, Egypt provided sanctuary to the deposed shah; for decades in Tehran, to the annoyance of Cairo, there has been a giant mural of, and a street named after, Khalid Islambouli, the assassin of former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. More recently, during the January 2009 Israeli military campaign in Gaza, an organization affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards put a $1.5 million bounty on the head of President Mubarak, which was posted on the website of the Iranian government's Fars news agency.

For Egypt, though, the bad blood is more about the present than the past. Cairo is primarily concerned about Tehran's progress in acquiring a nuclear weapon. There are also indications—such as the accusation against the arrested cell members—that Egypt is troubled about Iranian attempts to "spread Shiism" to the Nile Valley.

These concerns seem to have been behind an Egyptian initiative in late 2007 and early 2008 to improve bilateral relations with Tehran. In December 2007, Iranian National Security Council head Ali Larijani visited Cairo. Subsequently Mubarak called his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But the short-lived attempt at rapprochement failed, and last month's arrests rekindled the animosity.

In the aftermath of the round-up, Egyptian security sources leaked to the press that it was highly likely that Iran "has connections" to the arrested cell. Meanwhile, senior Hezbollah officials have accused Cairo of "fabricating" the story, and "blowing the affair out of proportion."

Facing increased economic pressure and an impending period of political transition, it is understandable that Mubarak has described the presence of Hezbollah on its territory as an Iranian gambit to "threaten Egypt's national security and undermine its stability." During a speech to military officers in late April, Mubarak vowed to Iran that Egypt would "uncover all of your plots and respond to your ploys," adding, with a flourish, "beware the wrath of Egypt."

There is little doubt that the arrests enhance Egypt's security. But the round-up of the Hezbollah cell also benefits Egypt with Washington and strengthens Cairo's position in the region. Cairo is looking to improve relations with Washington, and it seems likely that the arrests will earn Egypt credit with the Obama White House.

At the same time, the move against Hezbollah may have been calculated to influence the electorate in Lebanon, where the pro-Western government faces a tight race against the Iranian-backed Hezbollah-led opposition in the June 7 elections. Indeed, Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki suggested that the government of Egypt had fabricated charges against Hezbollah cells expressly for this purpose.

One additional but perhaps unintended benefit for the Mubarak regime appears to have been the ill-advised response of the Islamist opposition to the arrests. The Muslim Brotherhood—which came out in support of Hezbollah's efforts to aid Hamas in Gaza despite the violation of Egyptian territorial sovereignty—seems to have misjudged popular sentiment.

The incarceration of Hezbollah operatives by Egypt comes at a critical time, just as the Obama administration is embarking on a controversial policy of diplomatic engagement with Tehran. In the Middle East, Washington's Arab allies are watching closely, concerned that the new president may choose accommodation over confrontation with Tehran. Although it would constitute an unlikely change in U.S. policy, the prospect that Washington may be prepared to live with a nuclear Iran is not a development that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other moderate Arab states would welcome, to say the least.

Egypt's going public against Hezbollah was a sign that Cairo at least has drawn a red line for Iran. With a little luck, should Egypt persist in its willingness to confront Tehran, it could encourage Washington's other regional allies to step up, facilitating international efforts to prevent Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon.

For Washington, Cairo's combativeness is good news that should be encouraged with concrete steps to support Egyptian efforts to counter further Iranian infiltration and subversion. Mubarak's visit to Washington later this month will be a good opportunity to explore how best to pursue this coincidence of interest.

As developments in Egypt suggest, Washington's Arab allies are increasingly concerned about Iranian inroads into the Levant. The preservation of embattled Arab friends should be a key element of U.S. strategy as Washington embarks on its policy of engagement with Tehran. Not only will this strengthen Washington's position at the negotiating table with Tehran, it will ensure that a robust Arab front is in place when the talks ultimately fail. ♦

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One China, Two Parties

Where Beijing and Taipei see eye to eye.

BY MICHAEL GOLDFARB

Taipei

In October 1958, Communist China was firing thousands of shells each day at Chinese Nationalist forces entrenched on the tiny island of Quemoy, just two miles from the mainland. The island had become a Cold War flash point, and the Eisenhower administration feared that the shelling would soon be followed by a Communist attempt to capture Quemoy and with it the tens of thousands of Nationalist troops garrisoned there. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles rushed to Taipei to meet with Chiang Kai-shek and discuss the complete withdrawal of Nationalist forces from the island.

According to an account in Jay Taylor's new book *The Generalissimo*, Chiang then sent a message to his enemies in Beijing warning that unless the shelling stopped he would be forced "to do what the Americans wanted." The day after Dulles left Taipei, the Chicoms announced they would limit their shelling to even-numbered days, leaving the Nationalists free to resupply their forces on odd-numbered days and bringing an end to the crisis. Zhou Enlai, the first premier of Red China, would later tell Henry Kissinger that Mao's Chinese Communist party (CCP) and Chiang's Kuomintang (KMT) had "cooperated to thwart the efforts of Dulles," who was pushing the withdrawal as part of a larger American strategy to permanently split Taiwan from the mainland.

More than 50 years later, American officials rigidly adhere to a One China policy lest they give any offense to Beijing, but the KMT and the CCP are still cooperating to thwart the efforts of those who would separate Taiwan from mainland China. That part is now played by Taiwan's Democratic Progressive party (DPP).

The 2000 election of DPP leader Chen Shui-bian as president of Taiwan marked the first democratic transfer of power in Taiwanese history, but after two terms in office Chen is in prison and his party in shambles. Chen had pursued a policy of "creeping independence" from mainland China, raising tensions in the strait and earning him a reputation as a troublemaker in Beijing and Washington. Chen's efforts to create a sense of Taiwanese, rather than Chinese, identity on the island were more successful, but with the KMT-controlled parliament obstructing his agenda and corruption scandals plaguing his administration, the DPP had little to show for his eight years in office.

In Taiwan's 2008 presidential election, KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou, the Harvard-educated former mayor of Taipei, easily defeated a DPP candidate who couldn't distance himself from an unpopular incumbent. Ma pledged that there would be no negotiations over reunification during his term, but his call for greater engagement with China and his steadfast support for the One China policy led opponents to question his commitment to Taiwanese sovereignty. During the campaign Ma was compelled to declare that he was not Chinese but "Taiwanese" (one DPP member of parliament alleged he was actually born on the mainland) and that he would be buried in Taiwan. After eight years of DPP rule, even KMT officials must pander to Taiwanese nationalist sentiment in order to get elected.

Since being sworn in last May, Ma has pursued a policy that his critics describe as "creeping reunification." Over the last year, the KMT has worked to deepen cross-strait ties by eliminating caps on Taiwanese investment in China, establishing direct air links between the island and the mainland for the first time (100 charter flights a week now run between Taiwan's domestic airport and Shanghai), and opening negotiations with Beijing on an "economic cooperation framework agreement."

On the surface, the KMT's policy of engagement has had some success. The air links have been a boon to Taiwanese businessmen, who previously had to spend a full day traveling via Hong Kong or some third country to get to their operations on the mainland. The flights—and a ferry service to the once closed military zone of Quemoy—also bring thousands of Chinese tourists to Taiwan every day, creating business for hotels, restaurants, and other sectors of the service industry.

The KMT argues that a less confrontational approach to cross-strait relations will lead to greater "international space" for Taiwan. Ever since the United States switched diplomatic recognition, Taiwan has seen a steady erosion in its international position, losing its membership at the United Nations and other world bodies and losing its embassies in all but 23 countries, most of them tiny island nations in the Pacific and banana republics in Latin America. (Beijing only allows governments to maintain full diplomatic relations with one China.)

President Ma and other KMT officials insist that Beijing will act out of a new, enlightened sense of self-interest; that the Communists now understand increased trade and a softer touch are the only way to win hearts and minds on the island and prevent any further drift toward independence. But many officials con-

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Quemoy 1958: Chinese nationalists returning Red Chinese fire

cede that a fear the DPP will return to power is the driving force behind Beijing's sudden flexibility.

The first major test of the KMT's new strategy came last week, when Beijing announced that it would accept observer status for Taiwan at the World Health Assembly. A failure to secure Beijing's support for this membership would have been a significant setback for the KMT, but President Ma made no effort to lower expectations and it seemed clear that some kind of accommodation had been reached with Beijing long before the official announcement. Indeed, one KMT official I spoke with three weeks ago discussed the decision in the past tense.

Later this summer talks will begin on the economic cooperation agreement. Next year a free trade deal between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China will take effect. Another deal including Japan and South Korea will follow soon after. Naturally, the Taiwanese fear being left out of a region-wide free trade scheme. KMT officials argue that a bilateral agreement with China would pave the way for bilateral deals with other Asian countries, all of which have so far declined to negotiate with Taipei for fear of antagonizing Beijing.

The opposition fears the KMT will trade away Taiwanese sovereignty in exchange for an agreement. To build opposition to the agreement, the DPP is also exploiting protectionist sentiment among the country's farmers and an overall lack of transparency in the negotiations. But the DPP has just a quarter of the seats in parliament and little leverage to pressure President Ma, who is so far refusing to submit the agreement for debate and ratification.

The backdrop for all this cross-strait diplomacy is China's massive military modernization program. According to Taiwanese intelligence estimates, the decades-long shift in the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait will reach a tipping point by the end of the year. The Chinese now have more than 1,300 surface to surface missiles pointed at Taiwan and a sophisticated air defense system capable of targeting and striking at aircraft as soon as they take off from their bases in Taiwan.

Officially, both the DPP and the KMT agree on the need to maintain the status quo, but the massive arsenal arrayed against Taiwan has changed facts on the ground and helped create a sense of inevitability to reunification. Closer economic ties may only increase China's ability to influence the political debate in Taiwan, as cross-strait trade and investment leave Taiwanese industries vulnerable to any rise in tensions. And as tourism from the mainland increases, another sector of the Taiwanese economy may well become dependent on Beijing's good will.

Fifty years ago the Chinese could only fire artillery shells and make threats in response to any provocation by Taiwan. In a few more years mainland China will be able to stop tourists, cut air links, and seize Taiwanese investments if Taiwan defies the Communist party. China will be able to devastate the Taiwanese economy. And if that fails to bring Taipei in line, Beijing can credibly threaten to take the island by force. But as long as the KMT is in charge, none of that will be necessary. After all, the KMT and the Communists share the same goal: One China free of the DPP. ♦

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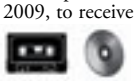

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Aristotle

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Waiting for Dough

The luck of the Irish runs out

A Dublin activist criticizes the one-million euro bonus paid to Irish Nationwide CEO Michael Fingleton.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Christopher Caldwell

More than any other country over the past two decades—more even than China—Ireland has given up its traditional culture for the global economy. In a quarter century, it went from being a little, poverty-stricken, priest-ridden agricultural backwater to a swingin', low-tax, wide-open, unregulated global-economy entrepôt. Last year, on paper, it was the seventh-richest country, per capita, in the world, ahead of the United States and trailing only a few oil exporters and tax havens. In the decade up to 2007, Ireland's GDP increased 350 percent. House prices quintupled.

At the same time, Ireland abandoned the "backward" parts of its culture. Partly through a string of sex scandals in the 1990s, but largely through its hostility to consumerism, the Catholic Church was discredited, and the culture built on it faded. (One small illustration: There are placards on public garbage cans all over Dublin bearing the catchy but not very Christian sentiment "Litter is disgusting—so are those responsible.") Ireland is not prudish anymore, either. A couple decades ago, 1 in 60 Irish babies were born out of wedlock; today 1 in 3 are. The country has some of the most liberal gay-rights and environmental laws in Europe. Nor is Ireland provincial. Its economy draws immigrants. There is a whole wall of books at the

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard. *His book* Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West *will be published in July.*

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Waterstone's on Dawson Street in Dublin marked "*Polskie Ksiazki*." Dublin has numerous mosques. Tiny Waterford (pop. 45,775) has an African Women's Forum, not to mention two "adult stores" (in case you're ever in Waterford and need to buy an adult).

This is all very exciting for the Irish, but there is nothing particularly Irish about it. Irish identity has often been—explicitly and officially—a matter of protecting citizens from both the temptations of modernity and the vicissitudes of prosperity. In 1927 a *Manchester Guardian* journalist asked Éamon de Valera, the father of the modern Irish state, whether he understood that closing Ireland off from trade, the better to protect its culture, would mean a lower standard of living. De Valera replied,

> You say "lower" when you ought to say a less costly standard of living. I think it quite possible that a less costly standard of living is desirable and that it would prove, in fact, to be a higher standard of living. I am not satisfied that the standard of living and the mode of living in Western Europe is a right or proper one.

More even than China, Ireland gave up its traditional culture for the global economy. Now we may be about to discover what happens when a traditionally poor country returns to poverty without its culture.

De Valera's Irish Republic was organized around the idea that money doesn't matter that much. This may have been a noble aspiration, it may have been sanctimony and foolishness, but there was at the very least something bold and, as Yeats would say, indomitable about it. Next to De Valera's uncompromising Christian renunciation, those two something-for-nothing ideologies, modern capitalism and modern socialism, are practically indistinguishable. Over the last 20 years, Ireland found riches a good substitute for its traditional culture. But now the country has been harder hit by the financial downturn than any country in Western Europe. We may be about to discover what happens when a traditionally poor country returns to poverty without its culture.

TIGER IN THE TANK

Until around the time the dot-com bubble burst, the Irish described their economy as the Celtic Tiger, after the high-tech and pharmaceutical companies that opened European offices there in the 1980s and 1990s. One senses De Valera wouldn't have liked these places. Much of the world's Viagra is made by Pfizer in the western village of Ringaskiddy. Botox comes from the elegant town of Westport, and one of the largest silicone-breast-implant factories in the world was until recently located in Arklow. Reductil, the slimming drug sold on the Internet, comes from Sligo. Google's European offices are in Dublin. Intel and Dell are still Ireland's two largest high-tech employers. But neither of those employs more than 5,000 people, and Dell laid off over 2,000 of them this winter.

The Celtic Tiger was partly the result of global economic conditions and partly the result of the country's policies. Ireland's decision to join the euro in the 1990s forced it to eliminate its chronic budget deficits and gave it the windfall of super-low interest rates, set for a European economy dragged down by Germany's struggles with reunification. Ireland offered a low-cost English-speaking labor force at a time when U.S. high-tech companies were looking for a springboard into European markets. Even today, Ireland is highly dependent on U.S. corporations, which account, directly or indirectly, for 300,000 jobs. Should the United States go protectionist, or should it inflate, which for Ireland's purposes would amount to the same thing, Ireland would be in trouble. On his St. Patrick's Day visit to Washington, D.C., the Irish *taoiseach* (prime minister), Brian Cowen, is said to have received an assurance from Barack Obama that the president didn't see Ireland as a tax haven.

This makes Ireland sound like a northern equivalent of a *maquiladora* economy, like Mexico in the years immediately after NAFTA. The Irish are sensitive about this imputation. "Our natural resource is brainpower," says one Dublin personnel consultant. That is true enough. It is probably not a coincidence that the biggest beneficiaries of the Celtic Tiger were the first generation of Irish born after the institution of universal public education in the 1960s. But education is not a commodity that can be monopolized. As labor costs have risen (by a third in real terms in the past decade), international companies have discovered that there are other, cheaper workforces that can also perform new-economy tasks. Jobs have left for Latin America, southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. That Arklow breast-enhancement business wound up in Costa Rica.

So how has Ireland continued to grow at staggering rates for the last decade? Mostly thanks to a housing bubble, which was like the American one on steroids. Run-of-the-mill three-bedroom houses in provincial towns were

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selling for 1.5 million euros. Prices in Dublin were up to seven times as high as in similar U.S. urban markets.

There seemed to be good fundamental reasons for a steep rise in house prices, starting with a rate of homeownership that approached 80 percent. On top of that there was immigration, the return of Irish exiles, a growing demand for vacation homes, and the new phenomenon of widespread divorce (making two homes necessary where one used to suffice). There were also government incentives for real estate developers and for the building of vacation homes in depressed areas. The most glamorous part of new, swingin' Ireland was deeply implicated in this speculation. Harry Crosbie, real estate-and-rock-music mogul, conceived—and, stranger yet, got financing for—a billion-euro construction project along the River Liffey. It would have included two skyscrapers, including a "U2 Tower," in which the band had invested heavily, and an Ozymandian 15-story sculpture of a giant man overlooking the Liffey. It was a narrow escape for Dublin architecture when Crosbie abandoned the project for lack of funds.

The result of the bubble was that, by the time of the U.S. subprime collapse, Ireland already had as many as 100,000 vacant houses. It also has empty golf courses, empty hotels, and empty shopping malls. Every last developable acre in the country, it seems, has been bought up (and bid up) by speculators. The bad loans attached to this overbuilding might reach 20 billion euros, or 10 percent of GDP. Housing prices are predicted to drop 50 percent from their peak, and development land 70 percent. Alan Ahearne, a former U.S. Federal Reserve economist who is now an adviser to the Irish finance minister, predicted over the winter that, "with possibly one exception, this country will record the largest cumulative drop in national income in an advanced economy since the Second World War."

Dublin firefighters protest the government's handling of the recession.

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PARTNERS IN CRIME

The villains of Irish finance, unlike those in New York and the City of London, were not wizards deploying the Black-Scholes equation or the Gaussian copula to turn the dross of subprime real estate into the fool's gold of CDOs. Far from it. They were just go-get-'em businessmen who started to believe their own blarney, cross-collateralized their properties, and got in way over their heads. As the financial journalist Tom McGurk put it: "Were you to gather together all of the senior principals in the six banks and building societies that approved this outrageous behavior, and join them to the property speculators to whom they loaned the billions, they would hardly fill a good-sized bus."

A few of the developers were young and dashing. Most of them were dissolute and lecherous-looking geriatrics. You could see them in the Irish weekend newspapers, posing in front of their huge houses and at charity balls with their toothy wives. Each of the developers had a signature Croesian excess, whether personal or professional. There was Sean Dunne, who had proposed to dynamite two of Dublin's historic hotels in leafy Ballsbridge to build a billion-dollar skyscraper; there was Sean Mulryan with his stables full of racehorses and his whole fleet of helicopters; and there was Johnny Ronan, who reportedly flew several dozen friends to Italy to have Pavarotti sing to him personally.

There is a good side to this lack of sophistication, of course. Boosters of Ireland's economy are keen to point out that there is little toxicity in its real estate market. Even harsh critics of the ruling Fianna Fáil party's economic policy—like the economics spokeswoman of the Labour party, Joan Burton—will grant this. It doesn't take an MIT doctorate to figure out what's wrong with the Irish

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economy, so the markets have had little trouble pricing the economy's assets. Shares in the Bank of Ireland, which were at 18.83 euros in 2007, now trade for 12 cents.

But there is a dark side to having your small economic pond fouled by only a handful of big fish: The whole social, economic, and political system looks like a con. Why, people now wonder, was so much of the financing in this supposedly open economy done by local Irish banks? The easiest answer to hand—and probably the correct one—is that the bankers and developers bought the protection and indulgence of Fianna Fáil. (The two main Irish political parties don't really have ideologies, but Fianna Fáil is the more historically nationalist and machine-oriented of the two.)

This unease has been heightened by a shocking lack of accountability. The banks' top brass has hardly changed from the days when they were actually making money. One of the few executives to resign was Sean FitzPatrick, chairman of the spectacularly reckless Anglo-Irish Bank, or "Anglo," but he was an extraordinary case. FitzPatrick got "director's loans" worth 83.3 million euros (which the bank's accountants, Ernst and Young, failed to notice) at a time when he was running the bank into the ground. Anglo peaked at 7.50 euros a share and was nationalized this year at 22 cents. When Bear Stearns collapsed, Anglo lost 23 percent of its value. When Lehman Brothers collapsed, Anglo threatened to take the whole Irish banking system with it. The government gave a blanket guarantee to Irish banks, using as security the country's National Pension Reserve Fund.

Most of the developers were dissolute and lecherous-looking geriatrics. Each had a signature Croesian excess, whether personal or professional.

Now, imagine what the reaction has been to the discovery that the National Pensions Reserve Fund has been used to underwrite golden parachutes. This spring, Michael Fingleton, the chairman of Irish Nationwide, became the face of Irish banking malfeasance in much the way that the AIG financial team became the face of the U.S. banking scandal—and for the same reason. Fingleton's last reported salary was only 2.3 million euros. But in 2007 Irish Nationwide reported that it had transferred a 27.6-million-euro pension fund on behalf of "members" (note the plural) of the plan. Turns out the plan had only one member—Fingleton. And that money constituted 85 percent of Irish Nationwide's reported pension-fund assets at the end of 2006. Fingleton agreed to resign at the end of April. He also agreed to pay back a million-euro bonus he had received after the government had used those taxpayer pensions to secure Irish Nationwide against collapse. Rather like Barack Obama faced with AIG, the Irish finance minister, Brian Lenihan, had seen that the Fingleton bonus was a disaster in the making. He had threatened to withdraw Irish Nationwide's guarantee if Fingleton kept his bonus. This led to a funny photograph on the cover of the satirical magazine the *Phoenix*:

Lenihan: *Return the bonus, or get the sack.*
Fingleton: *How much is in the sack?*

REAL MONEY AND FAKE

Ireland once looked to many investors like a versatile economy, matching American dynamism with European security. But now certain commentators are warning that it might be the other way around. "Ireland is like a jockey riding two horses," said the economist and author David McWilliams in Dublin this March. "When the horses are moving together, everything works well. When they're not, the jockey can get a terrible pain in the groin."

Ordinarily, a small, export-dependent economy in which wages are becoming less competitive can regain its edge by devaluing its currency. But Ireland is in the euro, and it is having a hard time staying in. According to the European Stability and Growth Pact, all countries must keep their deficits below 3 percent of GDP. No country until recently has ever gone above 5 percent. Ireland is now at 11 percent, or 20 billion euros. The European Central Bank has given Ireland until 2013 to get back into conformity.

Two-thirds of companies surveyed by the accountants Price Waterhouse Coopers said they were planning on cutting jobs this year. Consumer spending is already down 20 percent. So the government is now faced with the need to raise taxes dramatically and cut spending in the face of a looming recession. On April 7, it announced its budget. Top tax rates have soared past 50 percent, and capital gains and value-added taxes will rise, too. A property tax will be added. And that will make only the merest dent in the 20-billion-euro shortfall.

A basic question remains, though: How, in the absence of leverage-creating derivatives and "toxicity," did a few real-estate yahoos' going broke cause the risk of sovereign default to loom over the previously solvent Irish state? In Ireland now, there is (as an American could predict) a lot of talk about how the past few years have been an era of greed, lacking in social solidarity. But in Ireland's case, this is not true in the slightest. There was plenty of care

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for the less well-off. It is just that the government got no credit for it because it delivered that care by lowering poor people's taxes.

The fiscal emergency had its roots in the generous-sounding "social partnership" model agreed on by the country's leading politicians in the late 1980s—a sort of Irish answer to Germany's social market economy. The key to the social partnership was assuring "competitiveness" in international markets. Irish workers wanted higher wages, but businesses wishing to locate in Ireland wanted lower ones. How do you square that circle? Through government. In return for workers' moderating wage demands, government would make sure they paid very little in income taxes. Half the income tax in Ireland is paid by people earning over 100,000 euros, and 750,000 people—a third of the workforce—pay no income tax at all. Where does the money come from, then? From transaction taxes ("stamp" duties, capital gains taxes, corporate profits tax) that were paid mostly by the real-estate speculators who were making money hand over fist. Everyone seemed content with this system, even the speculators. It is, after all, easier to tax people's fake money than their real money.

The government could thus stimulate consumption (and consumerism) through low income taxes without having to stint on entitlements. This explains how, for a while, the ruling Fianna Fáil party managed to become the party of both the upper-middle class and the working class—much as U.S. Republicans did by a superficially different but essentially similar shell game.

Waterford will wait in vain for its crystal plant to reopen. Much of the plant's production will be transferred to the Czech Republic.

We can see now that this arrangement was a time bomb. We can also see that the politically connected developers did a good deal to wreck the economy. But there is no denying that, by golly, they paid a lot of taxes. All this meant, though, was that the state became just as dependent on the housing bubble as the private sector. When more money came in, the government just spent it. The featherbedding patronage state is about the only Irish tradition that the global economy did not kill. Government employees make 25 percent more than equivalently situated private employees, according to the Dublin-based Economic and Social Research Institute. Government employees got very powerful in the process. So over the winter, when politicians decided to cut public-sector pay, they weren't exactly forthright—they proposed lopping 7.5 percent off the top and called it a "pension levy."

The head of the Labour party, Eamon Gilmore, recently attacked the finance ministry on the grounds that its new, trimmed budget requires more austerity than the country at large can handle. Gilmore has called instead for an Obama-style stimulus package. This is far more difficult to pull off when you are dependent on foreign investors and don't control the currency in which your debts are denominated—but at least it promises a continuation of something-for-nothing! Unsurprisingly, Gilmore is now the most popular politician in the country.

PRISONERS OF THE OPEN ECONOMY

There is lots of unrest and anger in Ireland now, and it is finding various outlets. Government statistics envision unemployment rising to 500,000 this year (in a labor force of 2.2 million). In protest against the pension levy, 150,000 people demonstrated in Dublin in March. Police unions and parts of the armed forces have also taken to the streets, which is supposed to be illegal. A representative of the army wrote to the defense minister for reassurance that it would not be used to break strikes, although it has often been called upon to do just that. Until recently, Irish workers had little to strike about. The country's largest union body, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, negotiated a 6 percent pay raise on the very eve of the banking collapse and some businesses are even honoring it.

Today unions are united. They are irate. Workers are having their wages cut unilaterally by the government and via negotiations with private business. You would expect upheaval. But even under the circumstances, unions' power to shake the government or win themselves a better deal appears to be meager. Ambitious plans for a national strike fizzled out when Impact, the largest public-sector union, failed to get the necessary votes.

Part of the unions' problem is that the economy is configured so that striking will do them little good. Ireland is now abjectly dependent on the global economy. Paradoxical though it may sound, this makes its workers dependent on government. The social partnership model has an iron logic. Once income tax rates fall to a certain level, Irish workers' disposable income can rise only through transfer payments. If it rises through wage increases, foreign investors will be driven off and there will be no pie to divide. So Ireland must run its economy in a two-step process: First, attract the direct investment from the global market. Then, if you think the workers deserve a better shake, use government to redistribute the income at home.

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People are coming to understand how appallingly little there is to redistribute. Waterford Crystal, the mainstay of a market town that has been making glass since the 16th century, recently ran into trouble. The company employed 3,500 people in the 1980s, but under the leadership of Tony O'Reilly—ex-rugby star, ex-chairman of Heinz, ex-billionaire—it screwed things up royally. It over-manufactured items for the millennium: The public turned out not to want the year 2000 commemorated in glass. It went on an acquisition binge. The death blow was Waterford's acquisition of the German porcelain-maker Rosenthal and its tardy discovery that Rosenthal had German-sized pension-and-benefits liabilities. And then came the bad luck of the falling dollar and pound. The company wound up with 400 million euros in debts and a share price of a tenth of a cent. Waterford went into receivership; the Waterford name is now owned by KPS, a private equity company in New York.

On a Friday afternoon in January, KPS announced it would shut down manufacturing at Waterford's Kilbarry plant. Two hundred workers staged an occupation of the visitors' center, which was once ("once" meaning last year) Ireland's fourth-largest tourist attraction, getting 350,000 visitors. The occupation won widespread sympathy in the town of Waterford itself. And why shouldn't it have? Much of the town's economy—hotels and mini-museums, sweater shops and espresso bars—is configured around those foreigners who want to see how Waterford glass gets made. Local women brought meals to the factory canteen to feed the strikers, and teenagers volunteered for janitorial work.

Fighting the closure of the Waterford plant in Kilbarry

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The town will wait in vain for the plant's reopening. After an eight-week sit-in, the company offered the 800 workers left at the plant a 10-million-euro payment—1,200 euros apiece—and they jumped at it, 90 percent of them voting for the settlement. A hundred some-odd workers have been allowed to stay on for another six months. Some labor movement.

Much of the plant's production will be transferred to the Czech Republic, and there is justice in that. Waterford is indeed an ancient glassmaking city, but its name became an international eponym for beautiful crystal only after 1947, when Charles Bacik, a war refugee from Czechoslovakia, revamped the place with the help of a number of fellow Czech glassblowers. One was Miroslav Havel, who developed the beloved Lismore pattern—the one you probably registered for when you got married.

On the other hand, since the factory will remain in the town, and since all these extraordinary Irish craftsmen will, too, it is hard not to share the puzzlement of trade union rep Macdara Doyle of the ICTU that a national treasure, cultural symbol, and economic behemoth like Waterford could just evaporate this way. "What's puzzling and annoying us is this," he said in March. "If you are going to re-grow your economy, surely you have to do high-end manufacturing. We're not all going to get rich pushing strange financial products. Waterford is to Ireland what BMW is to Germany. It's by no means a busted flush."

I visited the factory with John Stenson, a 56-year-old master wedge cutter who took early retirement last year, after working at the plant for 40 years. Stenson is still owed tens of thousands out of his severance payment that he expects never to see. He apprenticed at the company for five years in the time of "Mister Havel," blowing glass and cutting it on old ceramic wheels. It was quickly apparent he was a gifted glassmaker. After three years of further training, he was certified a master, and ran his own "bench" of six artisans. He toured the United States explaining and demonstrating to Americans the craft of glass-cutting as practiced by artisans of Waterford. He handmade six serving dishes for Prince Charles. He designed, sculpted, and cut the crystal grandfather clock that is (or was) the central exhibit in the Waterford visitors' center.

"He is a man of many talents!" said one of his admiring former colleagues, also unemployed after working at the plant for decades, who had managed to get a temp job as a security guard there.

"Well, I'm on the dole now," Stenson said. ♦

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The Party of 'Yes, but'

Republicans can say more than just 'no' to Obama's policies

By Irwin M. Stelzer

Rahm Emanuel says that the Republican party has become the party of "no"—devoid of constructive alternatives to those parts of the Obama program to which Republicans and conservatives object. There is some truth in that. After all, there is much to which to say "no": a stimulus program that hasn't got much to do with stimulating the economy; a budget that threatens the nation with financial ruin and future generations with an inheritance inscribed in red ink; massive and, worse still, irreversible federal intrusions into key segments of the economy; and a foreign policy aimed at grasping the hand of Hugo Chávez while turning a cold shoulder to Benjamin Netanyahu.

But there is more to a loyal opposition than saying "no." There is an obligation to propose solutions to problems that need solving. We conservatives might not be the change we have been waiting for, but neither should we oppose change simply because we are offended by those who claim to personify it. Besides, as Barack Obama is fond of pointing out, they won. He and his congressional colleagues swept the board because Republicans in power acted as if compassion requires a major expansion of spending and of the size of government; because George W. Bush was a less than competent communicator; because the estimable John McCain's shambolic campaign led voters to question his ability to manage the federal bureaucracy. Every reader will have his own list, so I will stop there.

No matter the cause, Republicans are now in the position of observers of the passing legislative and regulatory scene. They have learned that the president's professed willingness to work with them in a bipartisan fashion was so much campaign rhetoric. Unless they come up with some really good alternatives to the policies being pushed by this avowedly transformational and dazzlingly telegenic president, they have no chance of being heard by voters in the run-up to next year's congressional elections. While the majority of Americans remain suspicious of big government and are worried about the consequences of the administration's spending spree, they see in Obama a bright, articulate, reasonable non-Bush. If you believe that conservatives' return to power is likely without new ideas to offer, read no further—for you, the problem is solved.

But few experts with whom I have spoken in Washington believe that the Republicans can make a serious comeback without having policies that accept the president's goals, but map different routes to their attainment.

No use arguing whether the globe is warming as a result of the use of carbon-based fuels: Rightly or wrongly, voters believe that to be the case.

No use arguing that the nation's health care system produces a quantity and quality of care that is satisfactory: Rightly or wrongly, many voters fear the financial consequences of even nonserious illnesses or of a loss of job-based insurance coverage.

No use arguing that the education system produces equal opportunity for the children of rich and poor to achieve their potentials: Too many unbright sons of alumni inhabit the classrooms of our better colleges while poorer kids lack the educational foundation that might gain them admission even if the admission criteria are skewed in their favor.

And no use arguing that the income-distribution and tax systems produce results that are fair and efficient: They don't.

In short, Obama has identified Americans' concerns and is in the process of persuading them to abandon their suspicion of big government and accept the fact that these ills can be cured only if government appropriates to itself a larger portion of the nation's income, hires a minimum of 600,000 more workers, and controls the availability and quality of such essentials as health care and energy. If he succeeds, it will be only because the Republicans have failed to show the way to better solutions. This would be a pity, since better solutions are at hand.

Start with climate change and energy policy. It has long been conservative dogma that there is no sense in trying to curb our own emissions unless China and India, which are constructing hundreds of coal-fired plants, do the same. True. But that only raises the question of whether it might be possible to elicit cooperation from emerging

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economies, countries that are attempting to follow the early American example and climb out of poverty in good part by replacing human brawn with electrical energy.

Given the dependence of those countries on our markets, several approaches are available. One being bandied about at the Department of Energy would be to tax the carbon content of imports, providing an incentive for exporting nations to reduce their emissions. Another would be to arrange cooperative programs in research into clean-carbon technologies, surely in the joint interests of the United States and developing countries whose citizens suffer from the health effects of their dirty-energy systems. Still another would be to enable relatively clean U.S. industries to receive credit for investing in pollution-reducing equipment in China and other emerging nations.

It is the position of many congressional Republicans (and not a few Democrats) that putting a price on carbon is a bad idea and that a cap-and-trade system is too expensive for the country to bear, especially during a recession. More than just saying "no," this relieves them of any need to develop alternative policies to solve a problem that in their hearts they do not believe exists. But it puts them on the wrong side of history.

If Obama succeeds, it will be only because the Republicans have failed to show the way to better solutions. This would be a pity, since better solutions are at hand.

If we accept the climate-change thesis, as most voters seem to, the emission of CO_2 is not without cost: It is bringing about a host of ills, if not soon, then eventually. No need to accept the Gore-y hysteria emitting from the former vice president or the daft calculations that purport to prove that the cost of emissions is so high that almost any corrective measures are worth paying for. It is enough to admit that there just might be a problem and that the purchase of a bit of insurance is in order. After all, we know that the odds that our house will burn down are low, but we still purchase insurance against such an event. The trick is to keep the premium paid in line with the probability and magnitude of the loss.

Consumers of fossil fuels are probably (possibly, if you prefer) imposing a cost on society and should see that cost reflected in the prices of the goods and services they buy. In short, put a price on carbon.

So far, so easy. But then comes Obama's cap-and-trade proposal, supported by Senator McCain, among others. As originally conceived by the president, the limited number of permits to emit CO_2 would be auctioned off, so that those most in need of what would then be a scarce resource would pay the most for the right to emit this greenhouse gas. Coal plant operators would have an incentive to reduce emissions so as to free up unneeded permits for sale. Meanwhile, producers of green energy would be competing with coal-based power that had become more expensive because of the need to pay for permits, and the energy system would turn greener.

Great theory, but unfortunately, that's not the way the world works. K Street did not close up shop when Obama rode into town to clean up the political process as well as the air. Congressmen from steel- and coal-producing states do not believe their constituents will support a program that taxes their manufacturing industries, but leaves the already-richer bankers, new media, and high-tech entrepreneurs in Nancy Pelosi's San Francisco unscathed. The result has been a series of deals to hand out free permits to those with the most skilled lobbyists—heavily unionized and heavily polluting industries—and others with a claim on the congressional leadership and/or the president. Printing permits is no different from printing money, and a bag full of permits is no less a temptation to corruption and influence-peddling than a sack full of small denomination notes.

All of which conservatives could point out is unnecessary and not very likely to promote green technologies. The history of cap-and-trade in Europe demonstrates that permit prices fluctuate wildly, depending on the number issued and the level of industrial activity. Which is why the trading arms of banks and private entrepreneurs are so fond of the system: Traders make their living betting on price changes.

But investors abhor such uncertainty. Invest in a new technology that can compete with carbon-based technologies when permits are selling for $40 only to have the price drop to $10 when permits are in excess supply and you are on a hiding to the bankruptcy courts—as several investors in solar and wind are discovering. The recession-induced drop in manufacturing activity in Europe has resulted in a glut of unneeded permits, just when manufacturers are having trouble getting credit from their banks. They are dumping permits for cash, lowering the cost of using fossil fuels, and the competing solar and wind industries and hawkers of conservation devices and technologies are feeling the pain.

Conservatives need not confine themselves to pointing out the defects in the Obama plan. It does have virtues—carbon is no longer a free good—but virtues that can be captured more efficiently and with less government intervention than cap-and-trade requires. Instead, conservatives can screw up their courage and take the advice of all mainstream economists and of politically savvy columnists from

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Charles Krauthammer to Tom Friedman—tax carbon and redistribute the proceeds by lowering taxes on wages. Tax bad things (CO_2) not good things (jobs). A carbon tax makes the use of carbon-based products more expensive, discouraging their use; it makes the consumer of such products pay the costs his consumption is allegedly imposing on society; and redistribution of the proceeds makes work more rewarding.

An advantage of this plan is its flexibility. My informal poll of a few greens and some representatives of coal-burning utilities turned up suggested tax levels ranging from $12 to $20 per ton of carbon. The most sensible suggestion was to start at the lower end and have the tax increase at a real rate of, say, 5 percent per year, so that industries have time to adjust, and green technologies all are able to predict the cost target at which they should be aiming. No need for the government to pick winners.

That leaves open the "energy independence" portion of the Obama energy program. Forget for the moment that the goal is so unrealistic that it continues to amaze me that politicians from the time of Richard Nixon have called for its realization with a straight face. Think of it instead as an unattainable goal, but one worth pursuing in the interests of the nation's security and of relieving future presidents of the necessity of strolling hand-in-hand with, or bowing before, the king of Saudi Arabia.

Conservatives are right to argue that the development of domestic resources should not be off the table, but they do need to do some careful cost-benefit analysis to specify just which resources will add more to our national income and our national security than they would cost in environmental quality. My guess is that most of these resources will survive such a cost-benefit test, and a comparison with the cost of energy-saving devices—the president's so-called smart grid—that reduce energy demand. If it is indeed cheaper to bring some of our domestic resources on line rather than to spend money smartening a large part of the grid, conservatives will have a coherent, market-based alternative to spending on all the gadgetry so beloved of technophiles, and of central planners who want producers rather than consumers to control how and when energy is used.

There are still other ways that the cry "energy independence" can be turned in a more practical direction. Mexico is heavily dependent on us as an outlet for the workers for whom it is unable to create jobs and as a market for its goods. But it prevents our energy companies from investing in its declining oil industry. It doesn't take much imagination to conjure deal structures that would allow Mexico to retain ownership of its oil reserves, but our companies to obtain a reasonable portion of the increased output that would result from the application of American capital and technology to the lagging industry. And it should take even less imagination to explain to the Mexican government the disadvantages to it of a U.S. policy that responds to its restriction on the free movement of capital between our countries by impeding the free movement of goods and workers. Tough stuff, to be sure, but conservative energy policy need not be for wimps.

Then there is the fraught question of income distribution, bound up with concerns about corporate governance, bankers' bonuses, and the regulation of financial institutions. Because so many financial institutions are now wards of the government, egalitarians in Congress have been provided with cover for plans they have harbored since—well, since long before this recession and the bank bailouts: Limit executive compensation, especially bonuses and those most visible of all perks—limos and jets. If the new definition of "rich" is an annual family income of $250,000, surely twice that should satisfy even the most avaricious pinstriper.

Conservatives know better. To limit incomes either by fiat, by inciting the pitchfork-wielders to take to the streets of Greenwich, or by punitive taxation is to discourage risk-taking, entrepreneurship, and hard work. But they should concede that there is something wrong with a system that rewards failure, leaves in place executives who have brought their institutions to ruin and their colleagues to Washington with begging bowls rattling, and fails to maintain the legitimacy of the market system by satisfying the majority of citizens that it is fair.

Liberals want to take steps to redistribute income. Conservatives should counter with policies that improve the process by which income distribution is determined, and let the results of that process fall where they may.

The most important reforms will have two things in common: They will relate pay to performance (teachers' unions opposing merit pay beware), and they will align private incentives with the public interest. We now know that mortgage brokers, paid with upfront fees, had every incentive to write NINJA (no income, no job or assets) mortgages and offload the risk of nonpayment. We now know that loan officers had every incentive to write as large a book of business as they could, since their bonuses often depended on the volume of loans they generated rather than the quality of those loans. We now know that the rating agencies had every incentive to slap "AAA" labels on securities because their fees were being paid by the dealmakers: no-deal, no-fee, and no need to worry about loss of reputation because government regulation made significant new entry into the rating business all but impossible. And we now know that at all levels bonuses were based on short-term profits, so that executives were immunized from any subsequent losses inflicted on

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their institutions by their lending and deal-making practices. Woody Allen's advice governed: Take the money and run.

Democrats see all of this as calling for armies of regulators to scrutinize lending and other financial practices. Surely conservatives can make a better case for limited regulation that sets financiers on the right path, rather than attempting to monitor every step they take.

Require a mortgage broker to have "skin in the game"—retain some portion of the risk associated with any mortgage he writes—and he will not be inclined to lend to borrowers who it turns out can't even make the first payment on their loans. Ditto a rating agency: Hand a coveted AAA-rating to a security that later proves to be risky and forfeit the fee, which must be held in escrow for several years. Support the market, which is already sweating some of the abuses out of the system by which executive compensation is set, with tough rules requiring independent directors (tougher than Sarbanes-Oxley already requires), more power to shareholders to approve compensation packages, rules prohibiting compensation consultants from accepting assignments from the CEOs on whose compensation they advise. All designed to set in place processes that make markets work better, that make it unnecessary for government to say $500,000 per year is enough and make it difficult for President Obama to contend that only he stands between the fat cats and the pitchfork crowd.

Finally, end the moral hazard created by banks too big or too interconnected to fail with a market-based insurance system. Premiums rise with the risk the institution creates for the financial system as a whole. Throw in counter-cyclical capital requirements that rise with the volume of lending, and you just might be able to get the government out of the banking business, as poor Tim Geithner is so reluctant to do despite urging from Barney Frank.

Combine all of this with a willingness to admit that notions of fairness are appropriate complements to efficiency when reforming the tax system, and you have an attractive and workable alternative to what is on offer from the president and, especially, the liberal wing of the Democratic party. Regulation that depends less on armies of bureaucrats and more on getting incentives right, corporate governance rules that align compensation with performance rather than mindless attacks on "the rich," and a tax system that is perceived as fair as well as being efficient—surely this is a more attractive package than big-government Obamaism.

A word about education. It is difficult to argue against the notion that the nation's interests are served by an expansion of educational opportunity. But that need not mean government funding of college for all. Instead, it could mean greater opportunity for each person to pursue the education that he or she decides is in his or her best interest. Studies suggest that the path to material well-being is not necessarily ivy-covered.

On the early education level we already know the answers: Expand parental choice by providing vouchers, usable in public or private schools. Rather than repeat the arguments in favor of such a plan, I suggest that conservatives insist that any politicians who oppose vouchers or similar schemes publish the names of the schools in which their children are enrolled. In the not-so-distant past liberals lost ground with Reagan Democrats when they forced other people's kids to be bused to troubled schools. Today's liberals might find that denying their constituents' children the advantages they bestow on their own, merely to placate the teachers' unions that are opposing the president's call for merit pay, just doesn't play well in Peoria. Nor would insisting that government funding of education be restricted to only those uses that Washington deems best, rather than handed to the intended beneficiary to use as he sees best.

Let's leave it there. Health care solutions are for health care experts to devise. They should be consistent with the Obama goal of expanding insurance coverage to as many Americans as possible, coupled with reforms that relieve the widespread anxiety that loss of job means loss of coverage. Like it or not, the status quo is not going to survive, and conservatives have a special responsibility to see to it that we do not drift into the sort of rationing system used in Britain, where until recently a patient had to be already blind in one eye to be eligible for treatment of macular degeneration in the other.

There is much more than "no" that conservatives can contribute to the health care debate: fewer rules preventing the sale of stripped-down coverage of catastrophic illnesses, removal of barriers to interstate competition by insurers, elimination of unrevealed and unseemly relations between physicians and drug companies, equal tax treatment of all medical costs. All designed to make markets work better.

Conservatives need to swallow hard, accept the goals of the Obama administration, and find ways to achieve them that minimize the growth of government and maximize reliance on market forces channeled by efficient regulation. Rahm Emanuel is trying to paint the Republican party as the party of "no" because he and his liberal friends do not want to debate alternatives to their plan to extend the reach and size of government. It is the job of Republicans in Congress and in the statehouses to force them to do just that, and of conservatives to supply the intellectual support for an effort to prevent government from becoming increasingly and unnecessarily larger and more intrusive. ♦

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Peter Mansoor, second from right, in Baghdad, 2003

NEWSCOM

The Learning Curve

Rediscovering counterinsurgency in Iraq

BY MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

Some years ago, the late Carl Builder of RAND wrote a book entitled *The Masks of War*, in which he demonstrated the importance of the organizational cultures of the various military services. His point was that each service possesses a preferred way of fighting that is not easily changed.

Since the 1930s the culture of the U.S. Army has emphasized "big wars." This is the legacy of Emory Upton, an innovative 19th-century officer who became a protégé of William Tecumseh Sherman when Sherman became general-in-chief of the Army after the Civil War. Upton believed that the traditional constabulary focus of the Army was outdated. Dispatched on a world tour by Sherman, Upton was especially impressed by Prussian military policy, Prussia's ability to conduct war against the armies of other military powers, and its emphasis on professionalism. Certainly Prussia's overwhelming successes against Denmark, Austria, and France in the Wars of German Unification (1864-71) made the Prussian Army the new exemplar of military excellence in Europe.

Baghdad at Sunrise
A Brigade Commander's War in Iraq
by Peter R. Mansoor
Yale, 416 pp., $28

Upon his return home, Upton proposed a number of radical reforms, including replacing the citizen-soldier model with one based on a professional soldiery, reducing civilian "interference" in military affairs, and abandoning the emphasis on the constabulary operations that had characterized Army roles during most of the 19th century (with the exception of the Mexican and Civil wars) in favor of preparing for a conflict with a potential foreign enemy.

Given the tenor of the time, all of his proposals were rejected. In ill health, Upton resigned from the Army and, in 1881, committed suicide. But the triumph of progressivism, a political program that placed a great deal of reliance on scientific expertise and professionalism, the end of the Army's constabulary duties on the Western frontier, and the problems associated with mobilizing for

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and fighting the Spanish American War, made Upton's proposed reforms more attractive, especially within the officer corps. In 1904 Secretary of War Elihu Root published Upton's *Military Policy of the United States*, and while many of Upton's more radical proposals remained unacceptable to republican America, the idea of reorienting the Army away from constabulary duties to a mission focused on defeating the conventional forces of other states caught on.

While the Army returned to constabulary duties after World War I, Upton's spirit now permeated the professional culture. World War II vindicated Upton's vision, and his view continued to govern Army thinking throughout the Cold War. The American Army that entered Iraq in 2003 was still Emory Upton's Army. Focused as it has been on state-versus-state warfare, Upton's army has not cared much for counterinsurgency, and this was apparent during the first years of the Iraq War. It is also the theme of several recent books on the conflict.

Baghdad at Sunrise is one of the best, written by a colonel who commanded the 1st Brigade of the 1st Armored Division during a particularly difficult year (May 2003-July 2004), a period that saw the rapid coalition victory over Saddam Hussein give way to a vicious insurgency that came close to defeating the United States in Iraq. A genuine soldier-scholar, Colonel Mansoor provides the unique perspective of a midlevel ground commander adapting to the requirements of fighting an insurgency under the most difficult conditions.

His perspective is enhanced by the fact that, two-and-a-half years after redeploying his brigade to Germany, he returned as executive officer to Gen. David Petraeus as Petraeus implemented the "surge" and the counterinsurgency strategy that helped turn the situation around in Iraq. Mansoor not only observed but helped to implement the Army's painful transition from an organization beholden to Emory Upton to one that recognized the necessity to adapt to an enemy who refused to fight the Upton way.

The conventional wisdom holds that it was civilian interference, especially on the part of Donald Rumsfeld, that was to blame for the difficulties U.S. forces faced in Iraq during the first years of the campaign. According to the dominant narrative, Rumsfeld willfully ignored military advice and initiated the war with a force that was too small. He ignored the need to prepare for post-conflict stability operations, and he failed to adapt to the new circumstances once things began to go wrong, not foreseeing the insurgency that engulfed the country.

It is undeniable that Rumsfeld made many critical mistakes. But the uniformed military was no more prescient than he. Did Rumsfeld insist on an early attack with a smaller force than that recommended by many uniformed officers? Yes. But the plan he pushed was a version of a scheme developed by an Army officer, Col. Douglas MacGregor. The military objective of this plan was not to occupy the country but to liberate Iraq from Saddam and turn governance over to liberal Iraqis. The approach was popular with both Rumsfeld and the military because both took their bearings from the Weinberger Doctrine, a set of rules for the use of force drafted in the 1980s which emphasized the quick, overwhelming application of military force to defeat an enemy, leaving postwar affairs to others.

The fact is that if generals are thinking about an exit strategy, they are not thinking about 'war termination'—how to convert military success into political success.

Did Rumsfeld ignore postwar planning? Again, yes. But in doing so he was merely ratifying the preferences of a uniformed military that had internalized the Weinberger emphasis on an "exit strategy." The fact is that if generals are thinking about an exit strategy they are *not* thinking about "war termination"—how to convert military success into political success. This cultural aversion to stability operations is reflected in the fact that operational planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom took 18 months while planning for postwar stabilization began half-heartedly only a couple of months before the invasion.

Did Rumsfeld foresee the insurgency and the shift from conventional to guerrilla war? No. But neither did his critics in the uniformed services. Mansoor makes this point clear by observing that, for at least the three decades before the Iraq war, the professional military education system all but ignored counterinsurgency operations. This cultural aversion to counterinsurgency lay at the heart of the difficult years in Iraq (2003-07), and in the absence of a counterinsurgency doctrine the Army fell back on what it knew: conventional offensive operations designed to kill the enemy without protecting the population.

The Army's predisposition toward offensive operations was reinforced in the 1990s by a sort of operational "happy talk" that convinced many (who should have known better) that the American edge in emerging technologies, especially informational technologies, would permit the United States to conduct short, decisive, and relatively bloodless campaigns. This was the lesson many learned from the first Gulf war, and the result was an approach that goes under the name of Rapid Decisive Operations. Mansoor observes that Rapid Decisive Operations misunderstood the timeless nature of war: "What we learned [in Iraq]," he writes, "was that the real objective of the war was not merely the collapse of the old regime but the creation of a stable government." As the old saying goes, in war the enemy has a vote, and in the case of Iraq, our adversaries voted not to fight the kind of war Americans preferred.

As the conflict morphed into an insurgency, U.S. ground troops responded by going after the insurgents, adapting conventional tactics to a guerrilla war. In *The Gamble* Thomas Ricks quotes a speech by an Army officer that captures the essence of the U.S. approach in Iraq until 2007: "Anytime you fight, you

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always kill the other sonofabitch. Do not let him live today so he will fight you tomorrow. Kill him today."

This approach made sense when the insurgents stood and fought, as they did in Falluja in April and November 2004. It also made sense during the subsequent "rivers campaign" of 2005, designed to destroy the insurgency in al Anbar Province by depriving it of its base and infrastructure in the Sunni Triangle and the "ratlines" west and northwest of Falluja. It unquestionably killed thousands of insurgents, including Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, as well as many of his top lieutenants, and led to the capture of many more. Intelligence from captured insurgents, as well as from Zarqawi's computer, had a cascading effect, permitting the coalition to maintain pressure on the insurgency.

But while successful in disrupting insurgent operations, there were too few troops to maintain control of the towns of al Anbar. The insurgents, abandoning their Falluja approach of standing and fighting the Americans, simply melted away, only to return after coalition troops had departed. Thus, while soldiers and Marines were chasing insurgents from sanctuary to sanctuary, they were not providing security for the Iraqi population, leaving them at the mercy of the insurgents who terrorized and intimidated them.

As the insurgency metastasized in 2005 the United States had three military alternatives: continue offensive operations along the lines of those in Anbar after Falluja; adopt a counterinsurgency approach; or emphasize the training of Iraqi troops in order to effect a transition to Iraqi control of military operations. Gen. John Abizaid of Central Command, and Gen. George Casey, the overall commander in Iraq, chose the third option, supported by Rumsfeld and Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. Richard Myers.

But while moving toward Iraqi control was a logical option for the long run, it did little to solve the proximate problem of the insurgency, which had generated sectarian violence. Based on the belief of many senior commanders, especially General Abizaid, that U.S. troops were an "antibody" to Iraqi culture, U.S. forces were consolidated on large "forward operating bases," maintaining a presence only by means of motorized patrols that were particularly vulnerable to attacks by IEDs. In so doing, we ceded territory and population alike to the insurgents. Mansoor describes this approach as a mistake: "Security of the population is the fundamental basis of any successful counterinsurgency strategy."

The withdrawal of American forces to forward operating bases also contributed to a "kick-in-the-door" mentality among troops when they did interact with Iraqis. This was completely at odds with effective counterinsurgency practice, seriously undermining attempts to pacify the country. And yet, despite many difficulties (including resistance from above), some Army and Marine commanders had been implementing a counterinsurgency approach on their own initiative; that is to say, forming partnerships with the Sunni sheikhs in al Anbar province who had tired of al Qaeda's reign of terror in the Sunni Triangle. By providing security to the people in cooperation with the sheikhs, the Americans were able to isolate Al Qaeda in Iraq. And as U.S commanders were struggling with the insurgency, the Army and Marine Corps were developing a counterinsurgency doctrine based on this insight, and an operational strategy that would successfully be applied as part of the surge in 2007.

As a close associate of General Petraeus, Colonel Mansoor helped serve as midwife to the remarkable shift in Iraq arising from a more general application of the lessons that he had learned during his 2003-04 command. This new approach rejected the position articulated by Petraeus's predecessor, General Casey, who had told President George W. Bush in 2006 that "to win, we have to draw down." And General Abizaid of Central Command, sticking to his belief that American soldiers were an "antibody" to Iraqi culture, seconded Casey.

But Petraeus agreed with Mansoor's observation that "counterinsurgency is a thinking soldier's war," requiring "the counterinsurgent to adapt faster than the insurgent." The time for applying a new approach was at hand, and to his credit, President Bush saw the necessity for change and took action.

One of the debates triggered by our experience in Iraq concerns U.S. force structure. As Mansoor puts it, "If we accept the premise that [counterinsurgency and] stability operations [are] of primary concern, then the Army's organization for combat should [be] different." This debate pits the "long war" school against "traditionalists." The former argues that Iraq and Afghanistan are most characteristic of the protracted and ambiguous wars America will fight in the future, and that the military should be developing a force designed to fight the "long war" on terrorism, which envisions the necessity of preparing for small wars, or insurgencies.

The traditionalists concede that irregular warfare will occur more frequently in the future and that fighting small wars is difficult. But traditionalists also conclude that such conflicts do not threaten U.S. strategic interests, while large-scale conflicts, which they believe remain a real possibility, *will* threaten strategic interests. They fear that the Long War School's focus on small wars and insurgencies will transform the Army back into a constabulary force, whose new capability for conducting stability operations and "nation-building" would be purchased at a high cost: the inability to conduct large-scale conventional war.

This is by no means a parochial debate, of interest only to the uniformed military, and its outcome has implications for broader national security policy: A force structure aligned with the requirement to fight conventional wars would make it more difficult for the United States to fight small wars. This may be a legitimate choice for the United States, but it is one that should be made by policymakers, and not delegated to the uniformed military. To do so would permit military decisions to constrain policy and strategy questions that lie well within the purview of civilian authority, and our experiences in Vietnam and Iraq demonstrate the dangers of leaving military doctrine and force structure strictly to the military. ♦

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James in Spirit

Just how Catholic was the Master? Not very.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

Among the usual pitfalls in critical writing about Henry James, two are all too familiar: One is the temptation to contest the Master in subtlety, his being "a mind too fine to be violated by ideas" in the famous formulation of T.S. Eliot. Another is to patronize unwashed readers who fail to rise to the strenuousness of James's more difficult prose. Edwin Sill Fussell's intermittently valuable study falls afoul of both temptations, and often.

The Catholic Side of Henry James
by Edwin Sill Fussell
Cambridge, 192 pp., $29.99

But what, to begin with, might one mean by the "Catholic side" of a writer who was not a Roman Catholic—or even, necessarily, a conventional believer? Perhaps the tales and novels in which an Old World religiosity is invoked, as in *The American* or "The Altar of the Dead." Or the transformation of Anglican ritual and practice after the Oxford Movement of the 1830s. That movement fostered famous "conversation narratives," as Fussell calls them, most famously that of John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman. And incontestably, as the author contends, there was in the English-speaking world of James's day a complacent "Protestant" bias, much of which has faded since Vatican II and the ecumenical attitudes flowing from it.

For the most part, however, Fussell scants these obvious critical strategies in favor of an assiduous, often minute, inspection of James's tales for evanescent overtones of Roman Catholic preoccupations and what he calls "Catholic language." He grants that James himself was never of the faith nor even, despite an occasional "wobble," tempted by it. Yet a teller of tales whose father suffered a transforming spiritual "vastation," and became a major exponent of Swedenborgian mysticism, and whose brother dabbled in psychic experiment and wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is perhaps a natural target.

He might at least be suspected of a religious sensibility. But that isn't to say that Fussell's probe, however intriguing in detail, is persuasive. In fact, *The Catholic Side of Henry James* calls to mind a classic satire—purportedly a review of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in a professional gamekeeper's magazine, professing dismay at the sacrifice of gamekeeping information to irrelevant chatter about sex. Here, Fussell's obsessive tracking of minute, and to other eyes sometimes invisible, signals of Roman Catholicity ultimately overwhelms his interpretive focus. And occasionally, good sense as well.

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It is always useful, in encounters with polemical works of this sort, to know something of the author's own spiritual life and history. But the only clue here is a passing reference to his youthful experience in a "Presbyterian conventicle." The patronizing noun says it all. Indeed, this brief autobiographical fragment raises a suspicion that we are dealing with the familiar convert's zeal; and that the patronizing tone is compensation for the deprivations and shallows to which the author was subjected in such a "conventicle" in younger years.

But that is speculation. What is far from speculative is the constant distortion to which Fussell's readings of Henry James often lead—the eye of the gamekeeper, so to say. Fussell fails throughout to acknowledge that what he calls "Catholic" language—for instance, "remission" of sins, "lift up your hearts," or "gathered with thy saints in glory"—doesn't necessarily signal borrowing, or theft, from the Latin Mass. Along with Greek myth, the English Bible and its precursors and the Book of Common Prayer have, for centuries, provided an armory of metaphor for English fiction. James's echoes of it are not at all uncommon. Nor need they telegraph the messages and implications that Fussell assumes they do.

Of course, the acid test of Fussell's theme, whatever it may be, is his reading of James's tales and phrases in such novels as *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The Ambassadors* and in such novellas as *The Turn of the Screw*. Of Fussell's peculiar critical method there is no better example than his flat insistence that the American millionaire Adam Verver, one of four principal figures in *The Golden Bowl*, is a Roman Catholic. Since this is a tale of disloyalty, deviousness, and adultery and its redemptive resolution by Adam Verver's ethereally charitable daughter Maggie, it is unclear why Verver's affiliation is of importance.

Fussell's argument hangs on an intricate Jamesian sentence: "Mr.

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. wrote about Henry James in his recent novel Lions at Lamb House.

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Verver himself had been loosely willing always to let [the Roman faith] be taken for his—without the solid ease of which . . . the drama of [his daughter's] marriage [to a highborn Italian] mightn't have been acted out." But what does Verver's willingness to let an assumption be "taken for" a fact mean (especially in a drama being "acted out") if not that the assumption isn't strictly a fact? This example serves for many other strained readings, and Henry James was not a clumsy writer of English.

Then there is Fussell's interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw*, a "mad tale" (might he mean a tale of madness?) as he calls it. This famous story is wrought with exquisite ambiguity and commonly viewed as a ghost story of the haunted house variety. The ghosts are two miscreant former servants, both now dead, who in the view of a governess are bent on corrupting two children under her charge. By all but universal consensus, the issue is whether the governess's detection of evil is delusional—whether the menacing ghosts are or are not real presences. (And I use such a liturgical metaphor at great risk, for notwithstanding its post-Reformation resonance, Fussell would certainly pounce on it as proof of a cryptic allusion to Catholicism.)

The author gives us an allegorical reading of the tale—and yes, he uses the word "allegory" explicitly: "The threat to the children," he writes, "suggests . . . the historical threat of return by the presumptively rejected and destroyed . . . pre-Reformation Roman Catholic English past, or even, more dreadful yet, recognition that that horrific past . . . had deviously managed to survive."

So far as more literal-minded readers can see, Fussell's dragging in of 16th-century English history, even as "suggestion," is gratuitous. It is tempting to dismiss such unconventional readings, which abound here, as absurd. But dogmatic dismissal would commit the endemic fault of this interesting book. It would merely echo the warped readings of Henry James and his literary ambiance that mark its pages from first to last. ♦

Into the Woods

Humanity's affinity for the forest primeval.

BY ROBERT FINCH

'Forest' by Paul Cézanne, ca. 1902-4

Over the years any number of scientific, literary, and philosophical explanations have been offered to explain our enduring fascination with wood, which Roger Deakin calls the "fifth element."

Harvard's sociobiologist E.O. Wilson, for instance, has argued that our cross-cultural preference for landscapes with open, scattered trees derives from humanity's origins on the African savannas. John Fowles, in his provocative short book *The Tree*, interpreted the ancient English myth of the "green man"—a figure half-human, half-leaves—as a powerful metaphor for our need to periodically submerge our psyches in the restorative chaos of "a green wood." And John Steinbeck once remarked that the best use of a giant sequoia was "to feel small next to."

Wildwood
A Journey Through Trees
by Roger Deakin
Free Press, 416 pp., $26.95

To this long list of musings on the perennial appeal of forests, Roger Deakin offers a peculiarly British take. In Britain he is best known as the author of *Waterlog*, a sort of naturalist's version of John Cheever's famous story "The Swimmer," in which Deakin swam in rivers, lakes, canals, and swimming pools from his home in Suffolk to the Hebrides. *Waterlog* is credited with sparking a movement to reopen and restore Britain's waterways to the public.

Robert Finch is author, most recently, of Death of a Hornet and Other Cape Cod Essays *and coeditor of* The Norton Book of Nature Writing.

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In *Wildwood* Deakin (who died in 2006 shortly after finishing the book) also submerges himself in his subject. He portrays himself as a kind of green man, living in a rambling 16th-century house in Suffolk surrounded by a moat, happily cohabiting with mice, bats, bees, wasps, and "the inquisitive tendrils of ivy that poked their heads in through the cracks in the rotted windows, fogged green with algae, patterned by questing snails."

As a writer, Deakin is an accomplished stylist. His prose is both precise and lyrical; it reflects an intelligence that responds deeply to its sensory environments, especially those he is most familiar with. The richest parts of the book are the first two sections, "Roots" and "Sapwood," in which he explores the woodlands in and around his home county of Suffolk. Like his English literary predecessors Gilbert White, Richard Jefferies, W.H. Hudson, and Edward Thomas, Deakin draws strength as a writer from his intimate knowledge of (and emotive connections to) these landscapes.

One of his gifts is making metaphoric parallels between the human and nonhuman, as in this description of a posse of badgers: "Emerging early from the snouting dingles of the town at dusk, they went their rounds with impatient efficiency, jogging from house to house like council workers on some lucrative bonus scheme."

Deakin is at his best when he is chronicling the ancient connection between men and trees and the ways in which traditional uses of wood have created the essential identity of rural Britain. In the chapter "Willow," for instance, he gives a fascinating history of the ancient craft of basket-making, for which 1,200 different varieties of willows were developed over the centuries, and a loving explanation of why "you can only make a decent [cricket] bat from the wood of the cricket bat willow."

In a remarkable short chapter entitled "Shelter," he spends the night in a primitive oak cabin and achieves that most difficult thing: an unforced epiphany, an extended moment of pure attentiveness worthy of Annie Dillard.

Like all good environmental writing, *Wildwood* convinces the reader, without preaching, that the places Deakin loves are worth saving. But like much well-written nature literature, it is limited by a kind of sameness, a lack of narrative or psychological movement. It also suffers from a forced celebration of contemporary attempts to regain the connection with local woodlands held by traditional rural societies, without recognizing that the essence of that connection was that their lives were *involuntarily* rooted in their home ground.

There are also a number of portraits of contemporary artists and sculptors who use local wood to create conceptual and environmental statements. Although the artworks themselves are effectively described and often intriguing, Deakin's appreciations and critiques tend to the superficial and ingenuous. Indeed, some of his examples cry out for satire, as in the case of one John Wolseley, who practices what might be termed The Scorched Earth School of Art: dragging large sheets of drawing paper across stands of burnt bushes. According to Deakin, Wolseley "realized the marks it made were more interesting than his half-finished conventional drawing: the landscape was drawing itself. "

The third section, "Driftwood," takes Deakin on a far-flung quest to investigate our relationship to wood in parts of continental Europe, Central Asia, and Australia. These efforts are, in general, less successful, though not just because he is a stranger in these places: After all, the outsider's perspective can be just as perceptive and valuable as the insider's—witness Tocqueville or Thoreau's *Cape Cod*. But in Deakin's case his strength as a writer is rooted in familiarity and intimacy, and here, in these unfamiliar settings, his portraits of landscape and people generally lack depth and complexity. The individuals he meets, whether artists or Aboriginal hunter-gatherers, are presented with British deference and unvaried admiration. After a while, despite Deakin's unflagging enthusiasm, I found myself flipping through the later chapters.

The one exception is the chapter on "The Bieszczady Woods," a large forested area in southeastern Poland, part of which is now a national park. Deakin and Annette, a female companion (there is an intriguing assortment of these throughout the book) travel by train and on foot from Prague to the Polish-Ukrainian border. Their journey retraces one undertaken by Annette's father, who fled from Ukraine back to his family in Poland just after the German invasion in 1939. Here the prose is clipped and stark, full of bleak humor, irony, fatalism, understated pity, and an unflinching recognition of the dark side of both landscape and human nature.

The woods themselves seem merely the motivation for a long passage through a devastated land and a grim history, birdless, full of lost, burnt villages, abandoned churches, nuclear bunkers, blind singing beggars, and "gluey mound[s] of desiccated condoms." Tellingly, they lose their way several times.

"Wood" here is used not as an Edenic image but as a metaphor for what was destroyed in the wars and crushing political systems of the 20th century. The whole dark haunted history of Eastern Europe is allowed to intrude on and overshadow Deakin's environmental quest, and for once he does not try to impose a redemptive ending:

> This corner of Poland has achieved a difficult regeneration, from being a place where everything happened, almost all of it brutal and bloody, to a place where hardly anything happens at all. At the post office, Annette sends a postcard to her father in Australia. He is happier living there, as far away as possible from Baligrod and its memories.

Here Deakin achieves the power of the narrator-witness, acknowledging that which he can see and feel but cannot understand or redeem.

I don't know what environmental good *Wildwood* may or may not achieve, but as a writer I wish Deakin had more often stood thus naked before the mysteries of both wood and flesh. ♦

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Ring's Inner Circle

Refurbishing the house that Richard Wagner built.

BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

The Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, 2006

ECKEHARD SCHULZ / AP PHOTO

Richard Wagner (1813-83) remains, and likely will long remain, one of the three greatest operatic composers who have ever lived, and he enjoys a particular following among intellectuals of the highest brow, who have been known to condescend to his only real rivals, Mozart and Verdi, the former as an elegant confectioner oblivious to the call of modernity, the latter as an inspired organ-grinder cranking out agreeable tunes to accompany the consumption of huge vats of pasta.

That Wagner declared himself "the most German of Germans," that he regularly cleared his throat for a juicy anti-Semitic spit, that many of those musically reverent highest brows have been capped by spiked helmets real or imaginary, and that Hitler adulated Wagner as no other leading political man has ever adulated another artist—such considerations have complicated or qualified the admiration for his operas, or turned it to flaming hatred. The public performance of Wagner's works was unofficially but strictly prohibited in Israel until 1995, and elsewhere Wagnerism has been assailed as an affront to liberal democratic decency.

The Wagner Clan
The Saga of Germany's Most Illustrious and Infamous Family
by Jonathan Carr
Atlantic Monthly, 400 pp., $27.50

Jonathan Carr, an accomplished British journalist and biographer of Gustav Mahler and Helmut Schmidt, has joined his musical and political interests in *The Wagner Clan*, an excellent family biography that honors the artistic genius and reviles the political venom of Richard Wagner's legacy. An ironclad family rule enjoined that the Master's descendants had to be faithful disciples if they were not to be deemed apostates, and living up to one's heritage was as much an ordeal for some as living it down was to others.

To be a Wagner was (and perhaps still is) to belong by birth to the highest reaches of the artistic aristocracy, preserving and transmitting the founder's renown down the generations, through the institution of the Bayreuth Festival, administered by the family and dedicated to his finest works. It was a proud fate and also a sad one, for one could never hope to be more than an epigone, in the service and in the shadow of the patriarch. Indeed, even to speak of the Wagner family as a heritable artistic nobility is a misnomer, because the true nobility belongs to the singular creator alone, and certainly ought not extend to the mere curators or interpreters of his masterpieces, even if they happen to be connected by blood and adept at their subordinate roles.

One cannot justly write of Richard Wagner's art without mentioning nobility, though that is what Carr does; for however repugnant his stated opinions and personal behavior often were—the index of Carr's book points the reader to Wagner's coarseness, ill-temper, lying, pettiness, philandering, ruthless egocentricity, self-hatred, spitefulness, sycophancy, thanklessness, and vindictiveness—his operas have to do with the noblest men and women undergoing the hardest trials of body and spirit.

There is a magnificent strain in the art of democratic times, redefining nobility for an age that has done away with the conventional nobility of birth. Mozart's Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* overcoming his lust and boredom and recovering his exalted love for his wife; Beethoven's Leonore in *Fidelio* saving her husband from a tyrant's dungeon; Goethe's Wilhelm Meister being guided by a secret brotherhood of the wise and virtuous toward happiness in love and work; Schiller's

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(and Verdi's) Marquis de Posa in *Don Carlos* giving his life for the cause of freedom and inspiring his friend the Spanish prince to similar daring—these superb men and women embody this newfound nobility and the hope that moral grandeur like theirs will flourish under the egalitarian dispensation.

Where Mozart, Beethoven, Goethe, and Schiller were writing in the exhilarating days of democracy's youth, Wagner is at work in the less appealing prime of democratic laissez-faire capitalism. George Bernard Shaw wrote in *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), still one of the best readings of the monumental tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, that Wagner's "picture of Niblunghome under the reign of Alberic [sic] is a poetic version of unregulated industrial capitalism as it was made known in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century by Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*."

For the sometime socialist revolutionary Wagner, who numbered the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin among his firebrand comrades during the insurrection in Dresden in 1848, and who was compelled to go into exile for 11 years afterward, dire capitalist darkness required, by way of heroic contrast, love and courage resplendent as a thousand suns.

So Wagner elevates his heroes and heroines still higher than his noble artistic predecessors did, to the plane of the superhuman. Lohengrin in the 1850 opera of that name is an ideal knight who appears from nowhere in a boat pulled by a swan to save a damsel in distress, and his chivalric prowess proves to be the work of the Holy Grail's sacred magic—music of what Thomas Mann called a silver-blue hue evokes shining manly virtue and fateful love.

In *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) the nonpareil knight and the Irish princess drink a love potion that launches them into transports exceeding by far not only the hottest operatic passions of other composers but, indeed, the known bounds of human longing. Death alone can rightfully consummate such desire, and Isolde's climactic *Liebestod*, as she joins her slain lover in night's kingdom, is music of incomparable, harrowing rapture.

In the *Ring* (1869-1876), Siegfried, the human grandson of the supreme god Wotan, literally does not know what fear is, slays the dragon Fafner guarding the hoard of gold that represents the moral tribulation of gods and men and dwarfish Nibelungs, wins the love of Wotan's disowned daughter Brünnhilde by plunging through the wall of magic fire with which her father surrounded her, and is murdered by a treacherous spear thrust in the back, earning a funeral march as majestic in its keening as that in Beethoven's Eroica Symphony.

An ironclad family rule enjoined that the Master's descendants had to be faithful disciples if they were not to be deemed apostates, and living up to one's heritage was as much an ordeal for some as living it down was to others.

The eponymous hero of *Parsifal* (1882), "a pure fool, knowing through compassion," resists the seduction of the immemorial temptress Kundry, who has woefully roamed the earth in various incarnations since mocking Christ on the *via dolorosa*, and foils the evil wizardry of Klingsor, a renegade knight of the Grail, catching in mid-air the spear that Klingsor hurls at him and that had once pierced Christ's side, and making the sign of the cross with it. Parsifal's rule revives the moribund Order of the Grail, and the opera—which Wagner declared was not an opera at all but a "stage-consecrating festival play"—ends with the elevation of the Grail, the chalice that was used at the Last Supper and into which Christ's blood flowed when He was on the cross, to music that answers the human cry for the numinous with a heart-wringing imperious warmth.

That so illustrious an artist as Wagner should be a moral imbecile is not a unique turn of events, but it is a profoundly disheartening one. Wagner was a very public Jew-hater, and his anti-Semitism was so intense and pervasive that it appears to have leached into his best operas. His most defensive defenders squirm every which way to deny it, but it is pretty well undeniable that villains such as Kundry, Alberich, and Mime in the *Ring*, and Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*, are Jewish caricatures.

The origins of Wagner's hatred bubble in the usual darkness. Poverty early in his career did not prevent him from indulging expensive tastes, and the need to borrow money led him to "Jewish scum" when "our people" failed to extend him credit. His resentment of the moneylenders and pawnbrokers was outdone, however, by his hatred for Giacomo Meyerbeer, the titanically successful operatic composer whom he imitated in the 1847 *Rienzi*, whose support he importuned and received, and whom he repudiated in a letter to Robert Schumann as "a source whose very smell I find repulsive."

In his 1850 pamphlet *Jewishness in Music*, written to settle Meyerbeer's hash, Wagner derided the "gurgle, yodel, and cackle" of Hebrew sacred song, compared the effect of "Judaic works of music" to that of a Goethe poem rendered in Yiddish, and adjudged Jewish attempts to make art as issuing in "coldness and indifference, even to the point of triviality and absurdity." His own success did not mellow him; the swamp fever only got worse with age. The so-called "regeneration" essays he wrote late in life, Carr declares,

> railed against Jewish influence in the press, scorned state moves to bring

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> about full Jewish emancipation, and even called Jews "the plastic demon of the decline of mankind." It is hard to be sure just what he meant by "plastic demon," but it sounds pretty dreadful and that, no doubt, was the main thing.

In private he was even more malignant: His wife Cosima (1837-1930) records in her notorious diary that, in 1881 at a performance of Lessing's rather preachy play advocating tolerance toward the Jews, *Nathan the Wise*, Wagner said jocularly that such a performance would be just the occasion to round the Jews up and burn them all.

Cosima, Wagner's longtime mistress and second wife, the daughter of Franz Liszt and the alluringly literary French Countess d'Agoult, was even more toxic than her husband, as her diaries and letters prove in abundance. As Carr writes:

> When there was anything to deplore, from supplies of rotten food for the army to a badly tuned instrument, as like as not Cosima found "Israel" or "Jewish revenge" behind it. She loathed Jewish faces and Jewish beards of which, to her particular irritation, she saw many among the public at performances of Wagner's works.

From 1876, though only intermittently at first, the cynosure of Wagnerian performance was the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, which Wagner had built specifically to stage his own operas, and where to this day only his own operas are staged. The premiere of the *Ring* in its entirety took place before an audience that included Bruckner, Grieg, Saint-Saëns, and Tchaikovsky. The philosophical nobility, for its part, was represented by Nietzsche, who had been Wagner's friend and devotee but who divined a sinister nationalism to the festival that was a fatal insult to his cosmopolitan sympathies: "*What had happened?* Wagner had been translated into German! The Wagnerian had become master of Wagner!—*German* art! The *German* Master! *German* beer!"

Wagner had, of course, made himself the German Master, but the way the Wagnerians, prominently including members of the clan, mastered even *him* is one of Carr's rich themes. The foreigners who married into the family were bent on yielding to no one in their fealty to Wagner—and indeed, on proving themselves more German than the Germans. Cosima, who outlived her husband by almost 50 years, directed the festival with a domineering punctilio, seeing to it that music and staging adhered to Wagner's own specifications, and that as few Jews as possible worked in the sanctum. She protected Wagner's hallowed reputation from any efforts to stain its purity, discrediting biographers who told of his sexual prowling and general unsavoriness.

Hitler, who in his youth had first imagined his leading Germany to world mastery upon seeing 'Rienzi,' was the most ardent enthusiast Wagner ever had. Most of the Wagners reciprocated the enthusiasm.

Her principal ally in the propagation of holy writ was Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927), an English polymath who married the Wagners' daughter Eva. Chamberlain wrote a hagiography of Wagner in 1895, but his 1,100-page best-selling masterwork was *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), which divides humanity into splendid Aryans and pernicious Semites, and argues that since Christ was the essence of goodness, and Jews are the nadir of vileness, He could only have been an Aryan Himself. Kaiser Wilhelm II, who knew choice passages by heart, wrote Chamberlain a gushing fan letter and initiated a correspondence spanning two decades.

In 1923 Chamberlain wrote a fan letter of his own to a political newcomer: "You are not at all as you have been described to me, a fanatic. The fanatic inflames the mind, you warm the heart. . . . You have immense achievements ahead of you, but for all your strength of will I do not regard you as a violent man." The recipient, Adolf Hitler, exulted at this benediction from an intellectual hero and precursor. (Some weeks later he proved Chamberlain wrong on the essentials with his failed beer hall putsch in Munich, which landed him in prison.)

The Wagners' son Siegfried (1869-1930) and his English-born wife Winifred (1897-1980) happened to be in Munich at the time—Siegfried was conducting one of his own compositions—and witnessed the firefight, in which a dozen Nazis died. In the aftermath Winifred, who had met Hitler not long before, spoke to the now-outlawed Nazi party in Bayreuth, composed an open letter on behalf of all the Wagners in Hitler's defense, raised money for the families of Nazi jailbirds, got up a local petition with 10,000 signatures demanding Hitler's freedom, and sent reams of paper to Hitler in prison, where he would write *Mein Kampf*.

Winifred conceived a passion for Hitler and his ways that lasted all her very long life; some suspected romance between them, though she denied ever having slept with him. Uncle Wolf, as the family called him, was a frequent caller at the Wagner homestead, Wahnfried. Hitler, who in his youth had first imagined his leading Germany to world mastery upon seeing *Rienzi*, was the most ardent enthusiast Wagner ever had. Most of the Wagners reciprocated the enthusiasm: Siegfried and Winifred's eldest son, Wieland (1917-1966), remarked as a boy that he wished Hitler were his father and Siegfried merely his uncle. Even the snappish family dog took an instant shine to Uncle Wolf.

Siegfried, however, emphatically did *not* cotton to Hitler or to Nazism. Demonstrating an un-Wagnerian cosmopolitan embrace, he replied in 1921

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to a newspaper editor who insisted that Jews be barred from the festival:

> If the Jews are willing to help us that is doubly meritorious, because my father in his writings attacked and offended them. . . . On our Bayreuth hill we want to do positive work, not negative. Whether a man is a Chinese, a Negro, an American, an Indian, or a Jew, that is a matter of complete indifference to us.

While Hitler and the demented nationalists of the Richard Wagner associations fulminated at the "racial desecration" of a Jew like Friedrich Schorr singing Wotan, Siegfried placed artistic values first, and Schorr is now widely considered the greatest Wotan ever. The gentle, bisexual Siegfried, who wrote 14 operas that have sunk without a trace and conducted 62 performances at Bayreuth, had a remarkable career by any standard but that of genius. He died of a heart attack suffered during a tempestuous Bayreuth rehearsal in 1930. He was one of the best of the Wagners.

Siegfried's daughter Friedelind (1918-1991) shared his decency, and possessed besides the fearlessness of her father's heroic namesake. For her courage she was regularly trashed in family circles and beyond as a bad seed. Although as a teenager she partook of the general admiration for Hitler, when war broke out she bolted in disgust for Switzerland, and withstood appalling verbal shelling from her mother, who was incensed that her defiant daughter should be used for Allied propaganda. Friedelind would move on to England, where she was imprisoned for nine months as an enemy alien, then to Argentina, and finally to the United States, where she worked as a waitress, dishwasher, and secretary, and eventually became an American citizen. She did not return to Bayreuth until 1953, hoping to take over management of the festival.

However, her brothers Wieland and Wolfgang (born in 1919) had been running the festival since its revival in 1951, and they shouldered their sister out of the action. Wolfgang had been wounded in Poland in 1939 and invalided out of the fighting while Wieland had enjoyed the Führer's special exemption from combat as a person indispensable to the Reich. After the war Wieland flummoxed Winifred with his ingratitude to Uncle Wolf by declaring that he should have joined Friedelind in exile, but he certainly proved indispensable to Bayreuth: From "a notable dabbler," Carr writes, Wieland turned into "one of the finest producers [stage directors, in American parlance] in the history of theatre." His characteristic style of stark abstraction tended to ignore his grandfather's explicit instructions, but made the dramas seem deeper than ever before.

> Decades later many of the scenes he conceived were still the standard against which newer efforts tended to be measured and found wanting; the menacing outline of the wizard Klingsor in *Parsifal*, spotlighted in space like a white spider in a gigantic web; the phallic monolith towering above the doomed lovers in *Tristan*; the passionate "outsider" Tannhäuser, dwarfed by the intimidating décor in the hall of Castle Wartburg and looking as vulnerable on the chequered floor as a lonely pawn on a chessboard.

KATHERINE EASTLAND

When Wieland died at the age of 49, Wolfgang could not hope to match his bold and lustrous ingenuity. Wolfgang's own ideas tended to fizzle, and as he contracted work out to other directors, many of them fashionable nincompoops, Bayreuth began to languish artistically. Financially, too, there were insuperable difficulties, and in 1973 the family ceded its empire, for 12.5 million Deutsche marks, to the Richard Wagner Foundation Bayreuth. But Wolfgang continues to head the operation, and apparently intends to hand control over to his 30-year-old daughter Katharina. Last year—too late for mention in Carr's book—with her direction of *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth, just the sixth production she had ever directed of anything, Katharina joined the ranks of the fashionable nincompoops with a version that was, by all reasonable accounts, an incoherent fiasco.

Bayreuth remains the hottest ticket there is—would-be patrons wait 10 years for admission—but the light of Richard Wagner's genius is threatening to go out in the theater he built. The excellence of his art is the only part of his legacy worth preserving, and now his descendants are ruining that, too. ♦

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Happy at Last

From maker of jeans to ripper of bodices.

BY JUDY BACHRACH

A Google search reveals that Gloria Vanderbilt, who is Anderson Cooper's mom and also a person whose name could once be found in cursive form on the back pockets of moderately expensive jeans, is 85. I shall just have to take its word on this, because Gloria Vanderbilt's newest book is supposedly about high-octane, addictive sex among the wealthy.

Obsession
An Erotic Tale
by Gloria Vanderbilt
Ecco, 160 pp., $16.99

Yes, even those who went to Miss Porter's School and married men who had (according to Ms. Vanderbilt) "something indefinable" about them can fall into this pit hole, and without a backward glance.

The next thing you know they're wearing, according to the author, "a mask fashioned from the wings of doves and white marabou feathers." Oh—and "a white strapless tulle dress." You don't, I hope, have to be told what happens next.

I know I'm acting all worldly here, but frankly, I didn't understand much of this novel. I am not only talking about the sex part, either—although that, too, was so complicated I could make neither (and I am not punning here) head nor tail of it. The whole book is thoroughly confusing. One minute some hooker wears "white caftans sewn by nuns in Florence." The next the Florentine nuns have been ruthlessly discarded along with their native country, and the very same hooker reappears in chartreuse jersey wool and an "artfully placed" Hermès scarf. It makes the reader despair of fidelity.

Equally disconcerting: the tone of menace that permeates *Obsession*, starting on page five. It is here that we learn that, during 10 long years of marriage, whenever a prosperous architect named Talbot (yes! Just like the wine!) returned from an alleged business trip to his high-born wife Priscilla, he "always demanded to make love, instantly, before even taking off his coat." Call me fussy, but for the other 155 pages all I could think of was the couple's cleaning bills. A decade of cohabitation, and every time he comes home in the winter, spring, or even the fall, each evening when the smallest chill is in the air, a costly article of clothing is ruined. It is almost with relief that one learns, also early on, that at the end of that decade Talbot actually died—during an anniversary party, interestingly.

Gloria Vanderbilt means, I know, to have us dwell on other matters, for instance the godlike abilities, sexual and otherwise, of her characters—"Of course he was a genius," she writes of the late Talbot—but in all of *Obsession* there is scant evidence of intelligent life. *Au contraire*. When the ambulance arrives, Priscilla immediately settles herself "on a stretcher . . . as though she too had died."

Perhaps the author is aware that readers, as opposed to architects, tend to be a cynical crowd, because what she lacks in substance or credible detail she makes up for with fist-pounding insistence: "I was proud knowing I made order out of the chaos swirling around that genius brain of his."

Anyway, how bright Talbot actually is isn't really the point of this novel. The point—as you've probably guessed by now—is that, before dying, he was messing around. Yes. With some S&M babe who is also into—writing letters. I cannot tell you how touching I found this last detail (well actually, both details, to be truthful). In the past year I have learned of two instances in which wives discovered their husbands' affairs by perusing their emails. (Reader, change your password.) But long letters, accurately spelled? Written by someone who lives in California? On thick paper engraved with "a small but costly crown and, under this, a bee"? Stuck inside envelopes "lined with magenta tissue"?

There's lots of stuff *Obsession* is missing: a plot, a sense of humor, and a storyline, for starters. But nothing, in my opinion, is more glaring an oversight than a voluble S&M mistress without a BlackBerry. Small wonder that Priscilla's first impulse on reading her rival's outpourings (after first erupting with a passage from Goethe on the subject of truth) is to wax lyrical and even platonic.

Gloria Vanderbilt, Sidney Lumet, 1962

> But what truth? Was this Talbot's—that when sexual boundaries no longer exist it [sic] frees us to integrate our personalities into the boundaries the world expects, the demands it imposes. This filled me with terror.

Yeah, and just imagine how I felt. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

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Going Boldly

Back and forth in time, but to what end?

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

In 1967, the television series *Star Trek* aired its most memorable episode, "City on the Edge of Forever." The crew members of the Starship Enterprise unknowingly rewrite history so dramatically that they themselves cease to exist. To repair the present, they must find the point in the past when things changed, and end up in New York in the 1930s.

Star Trek
Directed by J.J. Abrams

There, they encounter a beautiful pacifist social worker. Our hero, Captain Kirk, falls in love with her. They learn that she is supposed to die in a car accident, and that their arrival has spared her. Her survival, they discover, will set in motion a series of events that will keep the United States out of World War II, which will allow Hitler to get the atomic bomb first and take over the world.

Since they saved her, do they now have to kill her? What else can they do to set things right? Setting things right was the secret to the appeal of the original *Star Trek*. Its crew was never supposed to meddle in the affairs of other planets, other civilizations, other cultures, but being good, responsible, liberal internationalists, they just couldn't help it.

What was (and is) remarkable about "City on the Edge of Forever"—aside from its implicit assault on the anti-Vietnam-war movement, which would be unthinkable today—is the Hobson's choice it presents its characters. Some things can't be repaired. A seemingly humanitarian act, the saving of a single life, will lead to the deaths of millions.

That episode was, at the time, the most mature effort in the annals of popular culture to deal with the moral and ethical dilemmas posed by the very problematic use of time travel as a plot device. It came to a necessary conclusion as a matter of dramatic structure: The past cannot be tinkered with—and if it is, the tinkering must itself be revisited and the proper events allowed to occur as they did.

Without the plot discipline that requires a time-travel scenario to leave the past as it was, the whole business just becomes a Rube Goldberg machine, with characters simply jumping backward whenever they want to make the present-day reality more appealing to them. That is suitable for comedies involving time travel, like the two *Bill and Ted* movies and *Back to the Future*, but not for science fiction. For science fiction to work, and work memorably, it has to offer a believable reason for every alteration in the nature of reality.

The writer-producer-director J.J. Abrams seems intent on ignoring the need for rules—any rules. On his beautifully made and insanely exasperating science-fiction TV show *Lost*, people travel forwards and backwards in time whenever it suits the show's fancy, can occupy the same time and space with their younger selves so that they literally exist in two places at once, and in general, make a hash of any coherent plotline.

Abrams has decided to imitate himself on the big screen. He has now produced and directed a new *Star Trek* movie, the 11th big-screen feature in the series and a deliberate attempt to relaunch it with a new cast of younger actors playing the *Star Trek* crew. All the trappings are good. The movie is dynamic and propulsive, and the new cast is terrific. It will surely be a hit.

But it's a mess, and a disgraceful mess at that. That's because Abrams and his screenwriters, Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, simply discard all fealty to the iron rules of time travel that made "City on the Edge of Forever"—the episode that was one of the key reasons the show so captured the imaginations of its viewers and became the phenomenon it did—such a haunting and memorable hour of television.

A gigantic alien spaceship from the future decides to rewrite history to its liking. That changes the past, but nobody seems all that interested in going back and fixing things, which is what would have happened on the show. Instead, we are asked to accept that a planet well known in *Star Trek* lore can be destroyed at a cost of six billion lives, and the event is simply accepted. Instead, Abrams and company also devise a *deus ex machina* in the form of one of the show's most beloved characters. He won't do anything to fix things, either, except try to turn young Kirk and young Spock into friends.

Now, that's very nice, but it's hardly germane. *Star Trek*'s characters, let us recall, were on a "mission . . . to boldly go where no man has gone before." That mission was to "seek out new life and new civilizations." It wasn't to practice interplanetary male bonding. Abrams's *Star Trek* is made on an epic scale, but in the end, it's nothing more than a Kodak commercial set in the 23rd century. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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"Vice President Joe Biden said on Thursday he would tell his family to stay out of airplanes or subways to avoid contracting swine flu, prompting his office to issue a clarification." —Reuters, April 30, 2009

Parody

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 5th, 2009

Statement from Vice President Biden's Spokesperson Elizabeth Alexander:

Last week on the "Today Show," the Vice President was asked what he would tell a family member who was considering air travel to Mexico. His remarks have since been taken out of context and misinterpreted. When the Vice President said, "Haven't you read 'The Hot Zone'? The 'Andromeda Strain'? Don't you know there is no way to stop this thing from wiping out half the planet's population?" his intention was not to set off a panic but to encourage Americans to read more. Likewise, when the Vice President replied to a question about altering his travel schedule by saying, "The only travel I plan on doing is to my secure, undisclosed location, away from the infected hordes of humanity, and staying there for 35 years," his hope was to promote better hygiene.

Yesterday, when the Vice President told auto executives in Detroit that "your only hope of survival is to make better, greener, more efficient, and more affordable cars that can travel on the road as well as in the air, possibly through time," he simply intended to spur innovation. Later, at a luncheon with Senator Arlen Specter, the Vice President did not mean to send a message of intimidation when he told the senator from Pennsylvania that "we own you now, we own your campaign, we own your votes, and we own your soul." Frankly, the Vice President is not sure what he meant by that.

Last night at a dinner with soldiers who are recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Vice President was simply being optimistic when he told them, "Don't worry, soon the Pentagon will unleash an entire division of battle-ready robots to do the work for you. Robots will take the place of humans at the front. Robots will one day be our masters. And that day cannot come soon enough."

Finally, the Vice President has decided, after consulting with the President, to cancel his speech today to the National Pork Producers Council. The speech would have encouraged all Americans to continue eating pork, provided each and every pig has been given a thorough medical exam, including chest X-rays, throat culture, and

(*continued*)

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